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VOL. CCCXVII.

MAMMON BY MRS. GORE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

MAMMON;

OR,

THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

BY

MRS. GORE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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MAMMON;

OR,

THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

HAD Mr. Molyneux foreseen the result of his communication, he might perhaps have shown himself less charitable, or less officious.

On arriving at Harrals, a little nervous as to the reception awaiting him on his speedy return, he found Sir John and his daughter taking quiet exercise on the terrace: the storm of the preceding day having swept the winter sky, and rendered it unclouded as spring-time. But even from a distance, he saw that his uncle's looks were far less auspicious than the weather; and, taking his letter from his pocket, approached them with it in his hand, as if holding a flag of truce.

To his great surprise, the contents produced a favourable change in the deportment of his uncle. — Compunctious visitings softened his heart. "Poor little

Clara!" Reduced to an income such as his daughter's ex-governess found insufficient. "Poor little Clara!" Compassion brought her before his mind's eye as the fair young sister with whom he had played at dominoes; not as the widow of the *taré* Dick Wroughton. At the idea of the insults to which she might have been recently exposed, he felt so much disquieted, as to propose returning to the house.

"Of course, dear Papa," said Netta, as she established him comfortably in his arm-chair, and brought a foot-stool for his feet, "of course, you will make poor dear Aunt Wroughton and her child comfortable for life? — How old is the little girl?"

Her father was ashamed to own that, though of the two children of whom Clara had been the mother, one, he knew, was dead, he was quite uncertain whether the survivor were the elder or younger. — Taking the chance that the one she had lost might have been her first child, — he replied, — "Twelve or thirteen," I imagine.

His nephew was too intent on other matters, to set him right. Hoping to get rid of young Molyneux, and desirous to pursue his reminiscences unmolested, Sir John now requested his nephew to write immediately to his mother, and obtain Mrs. Wroughton's present address.

"She must have left Frankfort by this time, and I have a letter of consequence to transmit to her."

"I will not, however, wait for the return of the courier from Rome," he observed to Netta, half-an-hour afterwards, when Edgar, on charitable thoughts intent, had hurried away to execute the commission — "Though my sister has not thought proper to write to *me* on this occasion, I cannot too soon set her heart at ease concerning her future prospects. — I will forward my letter through Rothschild's house. — They have always acted as her bankers."

Netta kissed her father's hand as she drew her writing-table towards him; as though the act of kindness he meditated were an obligation conferred on herself. She had no vulgar missish curiosity to learn the amount and manner of the benefaction meditated by Sir John.

Could she have surmised its nature, she would have been less incurious. The offer came, not inscribed with either of the three mystic initials, accused of regulating the movements of Sir John. Neither L. S. nor D. appeared in his letter. — He simply requested his sister to make his house her home: bringing little Hilda to be the friend and companion of his daughter! —

For the first time, he discerned an advantage in the total want of family connexion imputed to Wroughton; for had there been any risk of entailing a large following, even of the most irreproachable kind, he would not have made the proposal. — But he knew

that the deceased had not a relation in the world. — During their journey homewards from Germany, to attend their father's funeral, Clara had confided as much to her sister-in-law; and at that epoch, though overcome by grief and remorse, Sir John had found leisure to note the feminine charm imparted by the cares of life to the manners of his once too lively sister. He could not desire a gentler or more lady-like chaperon for the heiress of Lynchcombe.

That Mrs. Wroughton would decline his proposal, seemed as impossible as, till the great year of revolutions brought such an event into notoriety, for a couple of European crowns to go a-begging. Yet had he been present when his letter reached the miserable house in the suburb of Durlach, into which the widow had subsided, he would have learned another lesson. Throughout her twenty years of alarms and mortifications, Mrs. Wroughton had never forgotten the emblazoned family tree suspended in the old hall at home; — never forgotten that she was a Woolston of Harrals; — and the pride that lay coiled at the bottom of her heart reared up its snaky crest, at the idea of becoming a poor dependent on the wealthy brother by whom she had been so scornfully cast off.

Her first impulse was to leave his letter unanswered, as he had left so many of her own. Her next, to reply to it by a recapitulation of her grievances against the only son of her parents. — But her

third, after glancing at her dear and beautiful Hilda, was to recall to mind that, in case of her own death, her daughter would be friendless in the world. — And, even while enjoying the benefit of maternal protection, to what insults had she not been exposed! —

For the moment that Wroughton's stern arm, pitiless heart, and daring assurance had ceased to impose a restraint upon his dupes, yells of accusations had burst forth against his memory. He was called swindler and forger; and in the general outcry, the names of his wife and daughter were most unjustly intermingled. They, more than all the rest, his victims, were scouted as his coufederates! Of those who, while living, had courted his company, and who now vilified and denounced him, not one was sufficiently generous to stand forward as the friend or even advocate of two helpless women. While endeavouring to establish their own virtue by trampling on his grave, they cared little whose name was soiled, or whose feelings distressed.

The very clerk who, as the bearer of a dispatch to the sister of the wealthy Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, M. P., addressed her with the utmost deference, had been employed only a few weeks before to upbraid and to threaten.

The dread of a repetition of such scenes prevailed, therefore, over Mrs. Wroughton's reluctance. *She* was inured to wrong and to oppression. But Hilda was a

gentle creature, whose young life must not be withered up by the blasts of adversity as pitilessly as her own.

She accepted, therefore, but without too eager a display of gratitude, the offers of her brother, including a credit of five hundred pounds at Rothschild's, to enable her to make her appearance, suitably apparelled and attended, under the roof of the millionary. — Little as Sir John had cared for her needs so long as she was exiled to the banks of the Maine, no indication of poor circumstances must disgrace the family from the moment she was admitted to share its bread and salt.

The completion of Hilda's education, the advancement of Hilda's interests, the establishment of Hilda's happiness, was now, poor Mrs. Wroughton fancied, assured. One of the finest of those safe and peaceful country houses of plenteous England, of which she had so often talked to her child, — that splendid London mansion of the Wraysburys, of which so many English loungers at Homburg and Baden had tantalized her by a description — were henceforward to be their home. — Having once accepted her new position, she soon learned to contemplate it with thankfulness. — As a prevailing breeze carries all influences before it, every thing tended to reconcile her to the change.

At Harrals, meanwhile, the prospect of her arrival

created eager expectation. — The one thing which Janetta had considered wanting to her happiness, was now in view, — the counsel and affection of her own sex. — Aunt Bessy was busy with her approaching change of condition; Aunt Sophy engrossed by the delicate health of little Nonny; and even at best, these tender monitresses were too far away, for the daily emergencies of life. But Mrs. Wroughton would be ever at hand to advise, and her little cousin to comfort her. — She should henceforward be the happiest — the *very* happiest girl in the world. —

Remembering the gratification she had herself derived from the preparations made for her at Harrals, she obtained her father's sanction to some little exercise of her own fancy in the apartments to be devoted to the use of her aunt and cousin. Mrs. Wroughton's rooms were to be grave and solid, as suited the sobriety of matronhood; but little Hilda's, adjoining, were to be all cheerfulness and light; — the hangings, the china, of the softest and gayest hues. A choice library of juvenile books was removed from her own school-room; and it was much that she did not complete her preparations for poor little Hilda by a wax-doll as large as the one formerly supplied with mustachios by their cousin Edgar.

So eagerly was she engrossed by her task, that both her father and Aunt Bessy thought it right to moderate her enthusiasm.

"Remember, darling," said the latter, "that your little cousin has not been used to these things; and too much exhibition of luxury might shock her as an ostentatious display of patronage."

"Be careful, my dear Netta," hinted, on the other hand, the niggardly Sir John, "not to inspire your cousin with tastes inappropriate to her condition. — As her fortune will be small, it would be wrong to mislead her mother into the idea that I mean to increase it. — Many things are unsuitable for Hilda Wroughton, which are mere necessaries of life to —"

He was on the point of being betrayed into saying the "heiress of Lynchcombe." But he recollected himself in time to modify his peroration into — "the position of your father's daughter."

Obedience to his injunctions was readily promised. Just then, Janetta would have promised any thing; so thoroughly were all the warm impulses of her young nature stirred by the prospect of such an accession to their family circle. She did not want to be released from her close attendance upon her father. But she felt that all parties would be benefited by an occasional change. — Two persons seemed lost amidst the magnificence of Harrals:

> For o'er that house there hung a solemn gloom,
> The step fell timid in each gorgeous room,
> Vast, sumptuous, dreary as some Eastern pile,
> Where mutes keep watch, — a home without a smile; —

a home in which she had almost dreaded the arrival,

from Eton, of her noisy, mirth-loving brother; to promote whose amusements, her father would not have consented to forego his severely exacted claims upon her time.

But now, all would become cheerful and sociable. — New life would kindle in that torpid atmosphere. Though Mrs. Wroughton was hastening from Germany, that she might be spared its Christmas trees and all the opening tumults of the Carnival, she would not, of course, object to the subdued gaiety of a happy family circle.

Harry came first: — Harry, with his "soul in arms and eager for the fray" of covert-shooting and three meets a-week. Though, before his great coat was thrown aside, he had hurried through a thousand questions concerning his father's accident, and loudly denounced the "muffishness of those who had been unable to detect the skulking offender, or unwilling to bring him to justice" — before he was half answered, he was off to the stables, to look at the hack and two hunters provided for him by Sir John. From which expedition he rushed back to tax his sister with having said so little, in her letters, in favour of their cousin Edgar.

"*There* you have been, bothering me for the last fortnight, Netta," cried he, "about these sauerkraut Wroughtons, who are coming in their sackcloth and ashes, to fling a pall over all our Christmas fun; and

scarcely given a word to young Molyneux, who, I find from Jem and Tandy, is the second-best goer with the Pytchley, and liked by high and low. In the stables, they 're all talking of him. When is he coming here? — Or when can I ride over to the Castle, to make his acquaintance?" —

But Janetta was not to be moved to more than careless answers. It was not *his* arrival she was looking for. A letter with the Dover postmark had made its appearance, to acquaint Sir John that his sister and niece had landed, and were already on the road.

Next day, the carriage was dispatched to meet them at the Hurdiston Station; and in the interim, how anxiously were the eyes of the pretty little heiress fixed upon the time-piece in the drawing-room, — a gorgeous mockery in ormolu and malachite of the solemn face and dusty feet of Father Time. For Sir John had insisted on proceeding alone to meet the travellers. Perhaps he wished to favour his sister with a few admonitory lessons touching the reserve to be observed towards his daughter; to whom, heiress as she was, no further deference was to be conceded than towards any anterior daughter of the house of Harrals.

Netta, meanwhile, was agitating herself to a degree almost disgraceful in a pupil of that self-possessed Miss Avesford, who saw nothing but dignity in the self-sacrifice of the King of Spain, who sat

composedly to be suffocated by a brasier, in order that the etiquette of his court might remain inviolate. Even Sir John was shocked by the impetuous way in which she rushed down into the hall to welcome her aunt, before the great portals were closed, to exclude a volley of wind which compelled her to embrace a great deal of damp crape veil, as well as her new relative.

Mrs. Wroughton was leaning on her brother's arm. But whose could be the slim figure, taller than either herself or Netta, also arrayed in solemn black? — Was it the little child's governess, or attendant? — No! the little child herself; — Hilda Wroughton, — no votary of dolls, — but a beautiful girl of seventeen!

How surprised and how pleased was Harry Wraysbury's glance at his sister that day across the dinner-table! — Not with the feelings of admiration or exultation in the beauty of their new relative that might have inspired her cousins Edgar or Olave. But because relieved from the anxiety uppermost in his mind, that with a little girl established in the house, governesses and school-rooms were inevitable. And of all the detestations his warmth of heart had ever allowed him to cherish, was the perpendicular preceptress who had presided over the early martyrdom of Netta. — He took less heed than his father or sister of the surpassing beauty of Miss Wroughton;

but thanked goodness that a young lady of her inches must be sufficiently stored with grammar, geography, and the use of the globes, to dispense with tuition.

In Sir John, however, the surprise arising from his niece's distinction of air was not of a nature altogether agreeable. Not that he was jealous in behalf of his daughter. — The representative of Adam Wraysbury was not the man to imagine that a new Helen would be capable of entering into competition with the heiress of Lynchcombe.

But he was sorry to see so little of the Woolston exhibited in her person; and if, in moral qualities as well as appearance, she should take after her scamp of a father? — If her mind should be as crooked as her form was erect? — If, with the delicately defined nostril, the oval face, the fine forehead, the long black eyelashes, that brought Wroughton painfully before him, she should combine his insidious obliquity of character?

He almost trembled at the idea, as with downcast eyes poor Hilda sat, overpowered by the splendours and numerous attendance of the dinner service. — It was with difficulty, indeed, that the kindly efforts of Miss Wraysbury extorted a word from her. *This* cousin certainly seemed to make up in taciturnity for the garrulous propensities of Edgar and Harry.

The latter, luckily, talked for them all; of what and whom he had seen that morning at the meet, and

what and whom he had *not* seen; and how, young Molyneux being among the latter, he had made up his mind to ride to the Castle the following day, and invite Edgar to come and help him shoot the pheasants. "Somers, the head-keeper, had informed him that the season was advancing, and that the birds must be shot down."

To this, the first demonstration on the part of the future Woolston of Harrals, his father would probably have opposed a slight remonstrance, but that on the day of his sister's inauguration, and while the travellers still looked so weary from their journey, he was unwilling to cast a further gloom on their spirits. — The young Etonian, therefore, was allowed to rattle on; his sister being probably the only person present who referred his high spirits to his buoyant age; and saw in his fine open, sparkling countenance, indications of a thousand virtues. She longed to learn what Lord Dinton and Uncle Farmer thought of her handsome, animated Harry. — But not half so much as she longed for the means of making up her own mind concerning her beautiful but over-ceremonious cousin.

CHAPTER II.

While these changes were progressing at Harrals, poor old Denny Cross was undergoing a process of transmutation equally important. — When Christmas arrived, to clothe the humble old village church with branches of laurustinus and holly, and the grateful village poor with linsey-wolsey and frieze, presented (as a thank-offering, perhaps,) by Lord Dinton, — only two months of his probation remained to be accomplished. The late Earl had died in August. In February — the month sacred to St. Valentine, — there was to be a new Countess in the county.

The old house itself seemed conscious of the approaching change. — Anxious to prepare it, as far as her means would allow, for the bride to be brought home by her brother, immediately after her own marriage, Bessy had been working away for months at such furniture as mere industry would supply: and had, perhaps, more real delight in fitting on the new covers and hanging the new curtains, than was derived by her brother-in-law at Harrals, from the grandest of his carved side-boards or costliest of his cabinets. — Her father was no longer capable of being vexed by innovation; and it was therefore easy to enliven by a

cheerful paper the dim old parlour, and replace the threadbare drugget by a solid Turkey carpet, — a wedding gift from the Earl.

All was becoming as bright as bright could be; and so pleasantly were the simple changes accomplished, and so cheerful an interest was taken in them by all parties concerned, that, instead of the usual complaints about the slowness and stupidity of workmen, the fastidious Edgar seemed quite as delighted as the jolly Hugh, at finding himself surrounded with paste-pots and snippings of chintz. As to Lord Dinton, he was as anxiously concerned in the placing of the new chimney ornaments presented by his nephew to the future Mrs. Hugh, and the introduction of one or two lounging chairs to replace the straight-backed horsehair instruments of torture in which for the last half-dozen years he had so thoroughly enjoyed his martyrdom, as if he had never frequented the gilded saloons of Belgravia, or did not call his own a Castle possessing its quarter of a mile of state apartments.

If poor Bessy's dimpled mouth and heart-lighted eyes smiled even more pleasantly than usual, there was other reason for it than the admirable fitting of the sofa-cover she had so dexterously cut out, or the admirable match to the carpet exhibited by the new rug. — The minor instincts of the weaker sex were not so wanting in her nature, but that the daily arrival of the cases containing the simple but handsome *trousseau*

with which the Farmers had claimed the privilege of supplying her, excited considerable satisfaction.

It was not that a man like Lord Dinton was likely to think more of her in a velvet gown than in woollen; or to fancy her kind face embellished by rich draperies of Brussels-lace. — But she wished to do honour to the position he was assigning her. She wished to appear to advantage in the eyes of those whose judgment he valued. — And when assured by the attached old servant who presided at the tryings on of the bridal dress sent down by her sister Sophy, that she looked like an angel, her blush was as girlish as Janetta Wraysbury's might have been under the same delicate circumstances.

Though Lord Dinton, as he sat day after day contemplating her quiet happiness, was of opinion that there needed only a glory round that lovely head to render it that of a saint, it was not unsatisfactory to hear herself promoted by others to the higher dignity which, though angels are supposed to be sexless, is usually appropriated to the feminine gender.

It was unquestionably very like an angel she bore with the saucy hoaxing and chaffing of her untameable nephew Harry; who maintained a schoolboy's privilege to create perpetual embarrassment for any couple on the eve of matrimony; and though Edgar was restrained by the dignity of his beard, and perhaps respect for his uncle, from joining in the young Etonian's indis-

cretion, his approving laugh was seldom wanting. — For the time, in short, Denny Cross enjoyed all the mirth which was temporarily suppressed at the Castle and Harrals by the predominance of bombazine. — And though Lord Dinton, on his return from town, whither he was occasionally summoned by the progress of the noble settlements in preparation for his bride, lectured the two boys on the practical jokes promoted during his absence by Uncle Hugh, they seldom waited till his back was turned, to resume the merry mood which they persisted was the indispensable preliminary to a wedding.

"Besides," added Harry, "you owe us some compensation, dear Aunt Bessy, for all the mumps and dumps we are undergoing at Harrals. Since the arrival of the disconsolate widow, the governor has sunk fathoms deep into the Slough of Despond; and is becoming nearly as confirmed a hypochondriac as the man in Zimmerman, who fancied himself a barley-corn, and dared not go out, for fear of being pecked up by his own chickens. — Though as well as ever he was in his life, my Aunt Wroughton persuades him that alarming consequences may still result from his election knock on the head; and that the stone is still lodged in his temple. Noise, — light — and music, — are consequently interdicted."

"And your cousin Hilda?"

"Oh! Hilda is worse than her mother: — looks

like the Tragic Muse in a picture-book, and talks to match."

"But you did not surely expect to find her very lively so soon after her father's death?"

"I expected to find her natural. When people are sorry, they cry. — Hilda never sheds a tear: but she goes prosing away to Netta, like old Hawtrey after a shindy in the upper school."

"Netta, however, seems very fond of her," — interrupted Miss Pennington.

"And more 's the pity! — See if she don't spoil my darling little sister! — Edgar! — Isn't it true, that, since Hilda Wroughton arrived at Harrals, Netta is no longer the same creature?"

"We are none of us the same creatures," replied young Molyneux. "We are all raven-struck — all growing solemn. For my part, I am beginning to be afraid that

> 'My soul from out the shadow that lies floating on the floor,
> Will be lifted nevermore.' "

"Oh! won't it, just!" rejoined the Etonian. "Wait till the weather changes, and we meet at Warling Gorse. Your soul will be lifted high enough, then; going it like a good 'un in no time."

"The sinister influence of the German witch has not yet reached the hunting field," rejoined Edgar, laughing, "because, for better security, I've had a horse-shoe nailed over my stable-door,

'To be lifted nevermore!'

But it *is* hard to see dear Netta's cheerful face growing so thoughtful."

That cheerful face, however, was frozen by other influences than her cousin supposed. — She was miserable at witnessing the profound sorrow of her new friend. Often afraid of having given her offence, Netta was constantly doubtful of having failed to afford her pleasure. Her pretty rooms, — the rare exotics rifled from the conservatory to adorn it, — the beautiful engravings embellishing the walls, — the dainty porcelain, — the trinkets of "barbaric gold and pearl," — seemed not so much as to attract the notice of Hilda.

One morning, about ten days after her arrival, while Harry was off to the Castle for snipe-shooting, the two girls were standing together at the window of Miss Wroughton's sitting-room, watching their father and mother, pursuing their prescribed promenade on the terrace below. — The brother and sister appeared to be enjoying the clear frosty weather; confiding to each other the truism which they believed to be a discovery of their own — though divulged to mankind by Solomon so many thousand years ago, — that "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." — *Désabusé du monde*, each wanted to render the other equally discriminating.

"Poor mamma looks sadly worn and fagged," murmured Hilda, more to herself than to her companion.

"Unluckily for my father," — rejoined Miss Wrays-

bury; "who, since so reduced by medical treatment, has required cheering and rousing. But nothing seems to raise the spirits of Mrs. Wroughton."

"They will rise in time," replied Hilda, gravely. "They will rise when they *ought*. The pleasant site of this cheerful house should cure, like the gales of Milton's Paradise, 'all sadness but despair.'"

"I am glad, most glad, to hear you say so," — rejoined Netta, with tears in her eyes, and longing to enfold her cousin's slender waist in a sisterly embrace. "I was beginning to fear you had taken a prejudice against Harrals."

"A prejudice?" reiterated Hilda, turning towards her, with the first smile that Netta had noted on her face.

"You seem to like nothing here. You have never expressed a particle of pleasure in any of your new belongings."

"Belongings? — What belongings?" again repeated Miss Wroughton, a little bewildered.

"All that this room contains; — all that I took such delight in selecting for you before your arrival."

"Not exclusively for *me*, surely, Netta?"

"Have you never noticed, then, that every thing bears your initials — H. W.?"

"No, indeed," rejoined her cousin, startled, on taking up a velvet blotting-book from the table by her

side, to find it so marked, in gold embroidery of the most delicate kind.

"I worked that for you myself," said Netta, — perceiving how closely she was examining it.

"Dearest cousin! — How kind! — *Too* kind! But even had I noticed it before, I should have fancied the initials your own. Netta is often used as the diminutive of Henrietta."

"You will not like it the less, I hope, because the work is mine, — the book yours?"

Hilda was silent for a moment. "I wonder whether you will like *me* the less," said she, at length, "for telling you the exact truth?"

"No, no, — *certainly* not."

"Then the exact truth is, that, for such things, I entertain not the smallest value. Don't be affronted, dearest Netta. I prize highly the kindness of heart which prompted you to devote your time to your expected guest. But for baubles and fine furniture, I care no more than the bird does which is flitting past the window."

Miss Wraysbury sat quietly down to listen. But her colour went and came. She was not accustomed to have home truths so plainly uttered. But when Hilda, who stood looking out of the window as if watching the bird to which she had alluded, turned suddenly towards her, the tears streaming down her

cheeks, proved that her plain speaking was in earnest,— not in scorn.

"I owe that much wisdom to my father, Netta," she continued, hastily brushing away her tears: — "my poor father, whom, doubtless, you have heard spoken of with such bitterness."

"I never heard him more than named," — replied Netta. — "*My* father seldom alludes to his family."

"In this instance, heartily do I thank him! — Knowing they were at variance, I was afraid my uncle might have dealt as harshly with his name as the rest of the world."— She drew a convulsive breath, — a heavy, heavy sigh, — ere she proceeded. — "I was not often with him. — But when we *were* together, he imparted to *me* the lessons taught to himself by the severe schooling of experience. Though my uncle may have spared him, you will hear some day or other, Netta, that my poor father had been profligately extravagant; and that he had even recourse to disreputable means to secure his selfish enjoyments. — It was so, — and it was from himself I learned it. — But he told me also, that for his vices he was indebted to parents far more profligate than himself: for they left him only a name to which he was not legally entitled, after rearing him in the midst of luxury, to which their own title was still more disputable. — Idle, useless, penniless, he was brought up an idolater of the trivialities of life."

"Do not agitate yourself thus, dear Hilda," said her cousin, soothingly, — as much terrified by her rising sobs, as she had once been by the repressed choler of her father.

"I must speak of all this, once, that I may recur to it no more," rejoined Hilda Wroughton. — "Otherwise, you will never understand me. Since we are to live together as sisters, dear Netta, (for which GOD be thanked,) you must learn that contempt of the luxuries of life has not been coldly preached to me, as a lesson, but branded into my heart of hearts, by shame, — by misery — by the sight of a parent's remorse. — My father, almost on his death-bed, bade me not only despise the toys of life for their worthlessness, but *loathe* them as the source of his errors."

Janetta, fondly pressing her hand, besought her to dismiss this painful subject. But Hilda would not be entreated.

"Do not fancy, however, dear cousin," added she, "that I blame in *you* tastes that may be innocently indulged, — nay, that belong to your position in life."

"If I only exactly understood," pleaded the heiress of Lynchcombe, "what you mean by the toys of life? — Where is the line to be drawn, — and *who* is to define it? — Do you include pictures for instance, — objects of high art, — objects of *virtù*?"

"I include the *superfluous*, — to whichever of the senses it may address itself; — I include music, —

paintings, — sculpture, — costly fare, — exquisite wines, — gorgeous plate —"

"Oh, Hilda! do not class such incongruous things together!" cried Netta, almost shocked by the practical views of her cousin. "A good dinner, and one of Raphael's Holy Families!"

"Well, I may perhaps exaggerate. — My experience and principles have been formed on an abject scale. — The great first law imprinted in my mind has been to acquire no new appetites and indulge no tastes, leading to unlawful expense."

"More than one man of genius," said Netta, in an extenuating tone, "has been a collector of rarities in every branch of the fine arts; Walpole, — Scott, — Peel, — Beckford —"

"I should like to pick a quarrel with your classification of men of genius," retorted Hilda, endeavouring to smile. "But pleasant arguments often degenerate into unpleasant quarrels. Let me, however, repeat the remark lately made to me by a dear and enlightened friend, — that the collection to which Horace Walpole devoted a life that might have been better employed, has been already scattered to the winds; and that Scott, the great and glorious, might have been spared for years to his country, but for the severe mental exertions created by liabilities arising from the gimcrackery of Abbotsford."

Janetta's thoughts were already wandering. This

was by no means the first time her enthusiastic cousin had backed her own logic by allusion to the opinions of a dear and valued friend. She dared not exclaim, in the language of her Majesty's faithful Commons, "Name! name!" — But her curiosity was not the less lively. She could not help suspecting, — at eighteen the imagination is volatile, — that Hilda's contempt for foppery, or rather, for every thing less than positive in this world of necessities, was quite as much attributable to the anonymous philosopher, as to the father concerning whose injured memory she was so susceptible.

Her cogitations were luckily interrupted by a loud clattering of hunting-boots along the corridor; and the sound of her name too noisily invoked for any lips short of those of a school-boy-brother.

"Netta, Netta! — where are you? where have you hid yourself? — *Such* a day's sport! — *Such* a burst! — *Such* a run!" — Then, after a vehement tapping at the door of his cousin Hilda's dressing-room, and a hurried "May I come in?" that waited for no answer, — in rushed the mud-stained boy, holding in his hand a fox's brush, that bore evident signs of recent amputation.

"Good morning, Hilda. — Darling Nettums, did you ever see such a beauty? — What Berty Grandison calls a plume for a Tambour Major! — And such a tag! — I've a right to be proud of it, for I promise

you I won it like a trump. Tiger carried me — no matter — keep your eye on 'Bell's Life' next Sunday, and you'll find news of us."

Miss Wraysbury knew by experience that she had no alternative but to take the bleeding trophy cheerfully into her hand, without remonstrating against the nature of the Sunday studies provided for her. — The philosophy of submission to the more savage sex had reached her by virtue of Pennington descent.

"I mean to send it to town and get it mounted for you, with a beautiful ivory handle," resumed Harry, on receiving back from her hands the unsavoury trophy. — "That is, on condition that you hang it up beside your whip-rack, and don't pretend to pass it off as

> 'Won by no hands as you may guess,
> Save those of Fairly fair.'

Or worse still, degrade it as that cut and dry utilitarian Professor Avesford did the one I brought you two years ago (as a tribute from poor Berty), by using it to dust the keys of your piano."

"*Noch ein!*" — observed Miss Wroughton, half aside to her cousin, smiling at this family manifestation in favour of the *dulce* over the *utile*.

But Netta shook her head. She would not, even in jest, hear of classing a fox's brush, though even mounted on the richest of ivory handles, under the head of artistic treasures.

CHAPTER III.

"UNCLE," said Edgar to Lord Dinton, as they were trudging together through the woods adjoining the Castle a few days afterwards, attended by a couple of keepers and a Clumber spaniel and setter or two, and better still, by a cheering winter sun, — "if you do not interfere a little, at Harrals, they will spoil our Netta for us!" —

"Not they!" replied the Earl, not a little amused by this sudden start.

"But how can you answer for it, — you, who notice just now nothing that passes on the face of the earth, out of the parlour at Denny Cross?"

"A sad account of me, Edgar. But I know thus much of what passes in a higher sphere: — that GOD takes care of his own. Such a nature as Janetta Wraysbury's was not created to be so readily spoiled. The seeds of mischief, if sown, would not germinate.— But what do you see so very terrible in progress at Harrals?"

"I have no opportunity of seeing any thing. Since the arrival of the Wroughtons, I have been so systematically snubbed, that I have raised the siege and

marched off my troops. I seldom go there now: — never, except for a gossip with Harry."

"It is from *him*, then, you gather your information?"

"It does not amount to more than that those two young girls mew themselves up all day long over their German and counterpoint; — Schiller, in the study, — then Bach, at the old organ."

"So far, no great harm," said Lord Dinton, while his companion put up and brought down a pheasant.

"Yes, it *is* harm," — objected Edgar, after the bird had been bagged, "because such a mode of life is not natural to Netta; and if our little linnet is to parrot the sublime flights of her Black Eagle cousin, there will be a singing bird the less in the world. I remember her telling me once, that when Miss Avesford declaimed the tirade of Camilla, it made her shudder as if an adder were in her path; and how she used to cry over Andromaque! — We shall soon be having her burn her Racine."

"No great matter," again rejoined Lord Dinton. "In a couple of months, Edgar, we shall all be settled in town, and then these poor girls are to be screwed up to concert-pitch by the masters in vogue, and taught every thing it is least useful for them to know. — Again a few months, and in the struggle of society, they will probably meet with *lords* and masters; and lo! the real lessons of life will begin."

Edgar discharged both barrels at a hare which crossed their path at a sufficient distance to insure missing her; — perhaps as a pretext for the angry ejaculation that followed.

But Lord Dinton, while pretending indifference to his nephew's communication, perhaps to probe the extent of his interest in the question, was by no means pleased at what he heard. — From the first, he had deeply regretted to see the daughter and pupil of a materialist like Wroughton, established so near this sweetest of Eves.

"I must speak to Bessy," mused he, as the uncle and nephew concluded, with a still increasing space between the two, their morning's sport. — "Netta must take her cousin over with her to Denny Cross, at her first visit, and Bessy will readily find out whether any thing is to be feared. — Like the Venetian glasses that explode at the touch of poison, the pure nature of Bessy affords an exquisite test."

And right satisfactory was the result. Bessy smiled at the idea of danger from that gifted and high-minded girl.

"There is some trace of Netta in her German cousin," she replied to the close questioning of the Earl, "though set in a different key."

By degrees, he elicited every detail of the visit; — the kind messages sent by Mrs. Wroughton, who, during her former sojourn in England, had visited

Denny Cross with poor Maria, and even then, seemed drooping and depressed.

"Hilda is deeply attached to her mother," resumed Bessy, "and it tells well for both, that, though so highly educated, she remains as artless as a child."

"How can you tell? — Why, you are a child yourself, my little woman!" cried Lord Dinton. "A well-grown baby might impose upon you."

"A well-grown baby, but not a full-grown impostor."

"But what makes you pronounce this German damsel artless? — Because she fell into ecstasies at sight of your lawns and laces, — your diamonds and pearls?"

"On the contrary, all the ecstasies were Netta's. I don't believe Miss Wroughton knows the difference between silk and cotton. Deficient as I am in the mysteries of fashion, *she* is far more behind-hand. No! I pronounce her to be simple-hearted, because, when I was beating about the bush concerning Edgar, and hinting, during Netta's absence on a short visit to her grandfather's bed-side, your nephew's dissatisfaction at being all but excluded from Harrals, she met the question as if it had been frankly expressed. 'My mother has probably discouraged his visits,' she said. 'From living so long abroad, she has adopted the foreign system of secluding young girls with almost conventual rigour. But in my cousin Edgar's case,

there are still stronger motives for ungraciousness. *His* mother, — her sister, — her own sister, — and for many years past her only sister, — who took so little notice of her during the trials of her married life that it had almost better have been none, — has taken to correspond with her since our adoption by my uncle. The first letter that reached mamma after our installation at Harrals was one from the Molyneuxes, — wife, husband, or both, — I forget, — expressly warning her against sanctioning any intimacy between Edgar and myself. — At our age, they said, attachments arose before people were aware of it; and they had other views for their son."

"*So* like Gerald and his wife!" interrupted Lord Dinton. — "The very thing to put it into the heads of the young people!"

"Not as regards Hilda. You would have been indignant — (at least both myself and Netta, who had now rejoined us, had a hard matter to find patience with her,) — had you heard Miss Wroughton exclaim against being captivated by so heartless, soulless, and useless a being, as her cousin Edgar."

"Did she so? — Then, by Jove, the chances are, that she is more than half in love with him already!" cried Lord Dinton. — "I told you, Bessy, you were a little goose! — Well! and when you had taken his part, and what Harry Wraysbury calls pitched properly into her —"

"That I should live to hear you quoting Eton slang! — I did *not* take his part. I thought it wanted no taking. — Instead of fighting a superfluous battle, I invited her to accompany Netta to our wedding, as one of my brides-maids."

"Why, we shall have a procession worthy of the Freischütz!" cried Lord Dinton. — "But I dare say the German muse declined stepping from the clouds for so sublunary a purpose?"

"On the contrary, she was charmed at the invitation. She had so much wanted, she said, to be asked."

"And her mourning for her father?"

"Is to be laid aside for a day. She said something about being little wedded to forms."

"So much the worse. But no matter. It is difficult for me to spy a fault just now, in either men, women, or things."

The girls, meanwhile, had enjoyed in their visit to Denny Cross quite as much satisfaction as they imparted. The angelic softness of Bessy's countenance and temper, made a deep impression on the heart of the German girl.

"A realized idyll!" was her inward thought. — But at sober Denny Cross, she found it necessary to keep many of her thoughts to herself.

Even Mrs. Wroughton entered with interest into their details of the beautiful *trousseau;* and the greatness so singularly thrust upon a family, which in her

earlier days at Harrals, the Woolstons had held in sovereign contempt.

"Who would ever have surmised," Sir John had whispered, when the forthcoming event was first discussed between them, "that the Lord Wilchester who used to come over and shoot with me, when we were brother Cantabs, and who, being too shy even to open his mouth, my father fancied would take a fancy to poor Carry, whose compassionate nature was always for helping a lame dog over a stile, would wait all these years for a wife, and choose one, at last, within a few miles of our park palings!"

"Or who would have thought that one of the Denny Cross girls, whom my poor father so delighted to disparage, should deal such a blow to the pride of Emma and her husband!"

"*Their* disappointment must be tolerably severe," rejoined Sir John, with an air of scarcely disguised satisfaction.

"But the strangest part of all, is to hear of Bessy as still beautiful, and of Lord Wilchester as a young man. Our career, dear John, is ended. — *Theirs*, about to begin."

Against this decree, the self-love of Sir John Wraysbury rebelled.

"Nothing very surprising in it," said he. "My brother-in-law, Farmer, was ten years older when he married. As to our public existence, we are starting

together, as contemporaries ought. Though my essay is to be made in the Commons, and Dinton's in the Lords, we are both on the threshold of a new career."

Mrs. Wroughton had been too long an exile from England to enter readily upon the puzzling field of English politics.

It was a pleasanter occupation to busy herself with the white muslin and white satin of the two bridesmaids, who, with Lady Mary and Lady Jemima, were to accompany the happy Bessy to the altar.

Harry was by this time once more up to his ears in Homer and hockey-stick: so that they were not only relieved from his importunate quizzing, but from the inquisition into their movements, exercised, through his means, by cousin Edgar.

The homely wedding of Hugh Pennington was not to be solemnized till a week after the grander ceremonial. *He* declared, that he did not choose to be overtrumped in the matrimonial game by a Cupid whose quivers were surmounted by a coronet. — But the real motive of the postponement was, that he might preside over the instalment at the Castle of the poor old squire, while the Dintons paid a short bridal visit to Havermead, an estate which the Earl had insisted on presenting to his bride.

"It was the first present made me by my father,"

said he. "And just as I received it, shall the deed of gift be transferred to my dearest Bessy."

Sir John Wraysbury was the only member of the extensive family circle who seemed to hear more than enough of all these wedding preparations. It did not suit him to be so thoroughly in eclipse. People had ceased to inquire after his health; and the county gossips were just then far busier with the future Countess of Dinton, than with the heiress of Lynchcombe. — No one evinced the slightest curiosity about even the part he was to take, on the ensuing meeting of parliament; and his daughter and niece seemed to care far more for the newly-furnished parlour at Denny Cross, than for the gorgeous mansion awaiting them in Carlton Gardens. Netta was looking forward to the arrival of the Farmers, and her sister, Hilda; to some unexplained pleasure connected with the wedding day.

It was perhaps as an outlet for the ill-humour which he did not care to exhibit at home, that the new M. P. began to interest himself just then, for the first time, in the statistics of his game-books. A lukewarm sportsman, he had hitherto legislated somewhat loosely over his hares and pheasants. But now that Harry was growing up, largely endowed with that organ of destructiveness, the development of which creates heroes in connexion with Minié rifles, and no-matter-whats in connexion with Purdays and Nocks, — it

was essential that the credit of his preserves should be worthy of the heir of Harrals, and capable of rivalling Edgar's boasted sportmanship at the Castle.

During the recent holidays, a battue had taken place, the returns of which were very mortifying to Sir John. — Though Molyneux Castle allowed its hares to be shot down by the tenants, and was so proverbially liberal of its game, that pheasants and partridges had ceased to be a luxury (or a nuisance) to the neighbouring farmers, Harrals, with all its poacher affrays and prosecutions, was disgracefully in arrear. — Even Harry felt ashamed of the beggarly account of empty game bags; and was not slow in retailing to his father the accusations brought in extenuation by his keepers against one or two of his tenant farmers, more especially against young Bothamley, of Ash Bank, a nephew of Mrs. Harpsden.

They were accordingly desired to keep watch and bring proof, so as to ensure conviction. — For the J. P. predominated just then in the mind of the M. P.; and he felt that it would be refreshing to have a relative of the Reverend William committed to durance vile. Kit Bothamley and his faithful lurcher were often seen skulking toward the Harrals woods at night-fall, about the time that the crack of a Manton was occasionally heard in the distance.

Though so long self-exiled from Northamptonshire, Sir John had re-enrolled himself, within the last six

months, in the *Vehm Gericht* of his country neighbours, to forward the grand country-gentleman duties of game preserving and agricultural distress preserving. As his highly respectable political opinions squared with those of his distant neighbour, the Marquis of Marington, his lordship's second son, Lord Algernon Rawdon, the most active committee-man of Sir John Wraysbury's election, had entered with him into an inter-magisterial alliance, whereby the poachers on the Harrals estate were grappled by the warrants and constables of Marington Manor, and *vice-versâ*.

Sir John had little trouble with the Marington population. For the marquis was both an old man and an equitable; — much fonder of his peasants than his pheasants. — His eldest son was a wanderer in the East; and Lord Algernon a theoretical politician, too much absorbed in studying the constitution and the chances of reforming the reformed parliament, to care more for the *ferœ naturœ* of his native shire, than as one of the less ostensible elements of bribery and corruption, whereby the grand bond of party is everywhere maintained; and to gratify the Honourable Member, on whose voice and influence he counted largely, his lordship consented to place the Dogberrys of Marington in co-operation with the keepers of Harrals.

The result was an affray, which placed one of these minor tyrants on a wooden leg for the remainder of

his days, and Kit Bothamley and one of the cowherds of Ash Bank in quod. — Without having incurred the odium of personally committing to prison a brother-in-law of his contemned relative at the Rectory, Sir John experienced the intense gratification of knowing that his foot was upon the neck of a family whom he reckoned as his worst-wishers in the parish.

CHAPTER IV.

NEARLY ten days after this catastrophe, and within a week of the long-settled wedding-day, Edgar rode over to Denny Cross; whose cheerful home circle was extended by the arrival of the Farmers.

"I told you, my boy, we should be here with the crocuses," said the old lawyer, heartily welcoming his young friend. — "Just in time to witness the signing of the settlements. — I have treated myself to a patent pen and pair of spectacles on new and scientific principles, for the purpose."

"At all events, I'm glad to find you here," was the reply. "Your arrival will leave less leisure for Aunt Bessy to fret over the news I have to communicate."

Miss Pennington looked anxious. The soft dimples had already vanished from her mouth.

"Don't look so frightened. — You are only asked to resign his company for a day," said Edgar, cheerfully.

"Whose? — Dinton's?" — demanded Farmer, a little surprised. "When I heard your horse just now, I hoped it was *him*. I have not seen him these three months."

"Nor Aunt Bessy these twenty hours: which is the reason she looks so savage at finding herself put off till to-morrow."

"But *why* put off?" mildly inquired Sophia.

"Inquire of one Elizabeth Pennington, spinster: — as usual, the cause of the mischief."

But Aunt Bessy, instead of looking savage, looked so sorrowful, that Edgar had not the heart to pursue his vein of bantering.

"The fact is," said he, in a more rational tone, "my uncle is labouring under a cold and sore throat, which the family imagine is about to turn to influenza. And as he was much the worse for being detained here yesterday till the raw of the evening, by one who I am happy to see look penitent for her fault, they have persuaded him to stay at home, this rainy day, to make much of his fireside."

"Quite right, — quite right," replied Farmer. "Dinton and I have left the age of rashness far behind us. — But what news do you bring from Harrals, Edgar?"

"How do you know I have been at Harrals?" was the brisk rejoinder."

"By inference. Because it is quite out of your road; and you look too fagged and heated to have come direct from the Castle."

Edgar looked more than fagged; — he looked harassed and worried. Besides, he hated being what

he called "placed in the witness-box," by Roger Farmer.

"When is Netta coming to see her sister?" persisted the old man.

"I don't know. — Not to-day, certainly."

"Why not to-day? She was fully prepared for our arrival," added Mrs. Farmer. "And we have not seen her so long!"

"She has other engagements, I believe; — perhaps previous engagements," — replied young Molyneux, carelessly. "My Uncle Wraysbury, too, is away; he is gone into Dorsetshire. He had some business to hurry through at Lynchcombe, in order to be back in time for the wedding."

"What is all this about Dinton's illness?" cried Hugh Pennington, — bursting into the room without so much as removing his wide-awake, — but shaking hands cordially with his sister and Farmer while he spoke, — for he had been from home at the moment of their arrival, an hour or two before.

"Only that he has got the influenza, and that they are coddling him at the Castle," replied Farmer, answering for Edgar, who seemed in far from the best of humours.

"Is that all? — Thank God! — One of Lord Marington's men told me, just now, on the road, that Dr. Gardiner was prevented going to the Grange to-

day, because detained at the Castle by Lord Dinton's serious illness."

"To which you of course answered, that his lordship was under your roof yesterday, till it was more than time that he should be under his own."

"Ay, ay! — I told him 't was some blunder — and that the Earl was the last man in the county likely to call in a doctor for a sneeze or two. — And now, how are you, Farmer? — And how are *you*, Sophy? — I could scarcely see your face till I was put out of my pain about this absurd report."

"I am just going up to see my father," replied Mrs. Farmer, taking her sister's arm, as a pretext for leading Bessy from the room. — "While we are away, my husband shall answer for us both. — Your health, dear Hugh, I am glad to see, there is no need to inquire after."

Edgar waited till the door had closed upon them, and even gave them time to ascend the stairs: then, in a suppressed voice, exclaimed — "It is all too true! — My uncle is dangerously ill. I would not appear too eager to return to him, lest it should excite Bessy's suspicions."

His two auditors had now drawn close to him, in troubled anxiety.

"The man was right, then?" said Hugh Pennington, gruffly. "I was afraid he knew what he was talking about, he looked so downhearted."

"Not downhearted as I am!" faltered Edgar,

scarcely able to repress his tears: — "for I am the cause of all."

"But my dear boy," pleaded Farmer, "you are surely alarming yourself prematurely. Since Lord Dinton was out only yesterday, — out, and well —"

"Out, but *not* well. The heavy oppression under which he then laboured, we attributed to a severe cold. When he arrived at home, he had a shivering fit, — and retired to bed, where he fell immediately into a comatose state. Before Dr. Gardiner, whom I had previously sent for without the knowledge of the family, arrived, an attack of fever had come on, attended with some degree of delirium."

"So rapidly?" murmured Farmer, with deep anxiety in his countenance.

"His illness commenced four days ago. And now, I am coming to the worst — just two days after a visit, at my entreaty, to Northampton gaol, where typhus fever is raging."

"Then why the deuce, Edgar, did you send him there?" cried Hugh Pennington.

"How was I to know it? — Even my uncle, who is one of the visiting justices, had heard nothing of the matter."

"But why send him there at all?" added Farmer, speaking more mildly than the incensed brother of Bessy.

"It is a long story; — too long for me to tell you

now, — for I must be off home. I came only at my grandmother's entreaty, to forestal any rumours that might reach poor Bessy."

"But briefly, — briefly! — What in the world took poor Dinton to that confounded prison?"

"There is a young man there, in whom I am interested, committed (unjustly as it would seem) for poaching on the Harrals estate."

"Well?"

"Sir John, on the evidence of whose keeper the warrant was issued, is away."

"And couldn't you wait a day or two for his return?"

"I wish to Heaven we had. But the friends of people in prison are seldom patient."

"But he cannot be a *friend* of yours, Edgar?"

"Almost a connexion. — A nephew of Harpsden's second wife."

"People whom you abhor and avoid!"

"People whom I have always avoided, but no longer abhor. Even if I did, justice is justice. — And when Netta wrote to me entreating me to bespeak my uncle's interposition during her father's absence —"

"Oh! Netta is at the bottom of the mischief then!" muttered Hugh. — "I might have guessed it."

"Don't say *that!* You wouldn't, were you to see her present agony of distress. — I went to Harrals to give her some intimation and warning of what was

going on; and she insisted upon being off directly to the Castle, to comfort and assist my poor aunts. — In short, they are all beside themselves. — For Dr. Gardiner has this morning declared the attack to be malignant fever; and forbidden every one but myself, and my uncle's personal attendants, to approach the room."

"I 'll warrant he forbade *you* among the rest, Edgar?"

"But you don't suppose I was going to take any one's orders on such a point? — I, above all! the sole cause of the misfortune! — I, my poor dear uncle's almost child!" — he added, with the tears fairly streaming down his cheeks. — "No! — I did not enter his room this morning after hearing the worst, — because I was about to visit Harrals, and this house. — But now, I am going back to shut myself up with him, till he is well again. — Good bye, — God bless you both. Take care of Bessy, and keep the sad trouble from her as long as you can."

Hugh Pennington accompanied him to the door, and detained him a minute or two from mounting his horse; endeavouring to dissuade him from the fulfilment of his pious duty.

"I am older, and better able than yourself, Edgar, to push through this heavy trial," said he. "I owe it to Bessy, who has so lightened my own burthen in life, to lighten hers. — Poor Dinton is past distin-

guishing between us. — Stay you here, boy! — Let me get upon your horse, and hurry back in your place, to the Castle."

"And terrify that poor dear woman to death, by letting her surmise the worst? — No, my dear Hugh! — Let me alone. — Let us all do our best. — The case is not yet hopeless; and it belongs to those who love him, to lend their aid to it, as he would have done under the same circumstances, to promote the greatest advantage of the greatest number."

Young Molyneux was off like a shot, almost before the words were pronounced; and Hugh, on his return into the house, was not much surprised to find old Farmer in tears.

"There is a great chance in his favour," said he, assuming, though with little confidence in his own predictions, the part of comforter. — "A constitution unimpaired by excesses, may make head against a malady fatal to loose-livers."

It might have been almost fancied that Edgar had thought proper to make them acquainted with the gloomy part he had been most studious to conceal. — For the malignant nature of the fever had been more than confirmed by the fate of the unfortunate lad whose bonds the Earl had endeavoured to loose. — The visit of young Molyneux to Harrals, had not been prompted solely by desire for an interview with Netta. — The Rectory had preceded the Hall. — He

was desirous of learning from Mrs. Harpsden how far poor Lord Dinton's interference had proved advantageous to others, though to himself so injurious; and of sustaining her courage to meet further mischance. — But alas! the house he entered for these good purposes, was in confusion: — Harpsden absent, — his wife drowned in tears, — with a sorrowful little brood of children clinging in silence to her gown.

"Oh! my dear young gentleman, — my dear kind Mr. Molyneux!" — was all he could at first extract from the afflicted woman.

"It was all too late!" she managed at last to articulate. — "Four days in the infirmary, and that ill-used lad was carried off from us for ever! — His father's favourite child! — My poor young nephew! — Harpsden was off at daybreak to the jail, to see if he could get leave to bring away the body, to lie among his own people in the Ash Bank burying-place. But even, for that, I'm afraid he'll prove too late. — Bob Burdon, too, the cowherd that was took up with poor Christopher, is lying in the fever, as bad (his parents tell me) as may be, to be alive."

All this was a sad hearing. — For humanity's sake, Edgar was deeply grieved. — For the sake of his poor uncle, how fearfully impressed!

"I hav'n't heart, — no, indeed, dear Mr. Molyneux, I hav'n't heart to go over to Ash Bank and see his poor brother," added Mrs. Harpsden, with renewe

sobs. — "It 'll be quite a break up of their little household, — for Kit, though a rough blade, was dearly loved among us. — You know we 're none of us fine folks. — And my poor nephew John will feel his brother's misfortune all the more, that ever since my brother's death, instead of doing a father's part by the boy, as he ought, he has let him run loose, and have his own way; sporting with rod and gun, here, there, and everywhere, as if the beasts of the field and fish of the stream on the land which our people have rented these hundred and ten years, were not by law Sir John Wraysbury's."

Edgar muttered something unpleasant respecting Sir John Wraysbury and his rights, evidently not intended to reach so far as the ear of Mrs. Harpsden.

"If you 're going on to the Hall, Mr. Edgar, as is most like," she resumed, in a lower key, "and as you do not often find your way to this house to enable me to send a message, please, Sir, be so good as to tell Miss Wraysbury how truly I thank her for having so readily complied with my petition, and procured Lord Dinton's good word in Kit's behalf. — But tell her the worst has come to the worst, and that our poor boy 's dead and gone; — (my brother's son, dead in the infirmary of a jail!) — Don't say killed by her father's cruelty, — though 'tis God's truth, Mr. Molyneux. It would grieve her kind heart too much to know such a thing. I never should have made bold

to write to her at all, but for hearing from Olave how good a heart she has, — so different from her money-hardened father! — Olave upholds her for a real angel. — Poor fellow! — a sad blow to him, this family disgrace! — For he dearly loved our Kit; and was always exhorting him and telling him his love of sport, and scorn of the law, might bring him at last to a bad end."

But Edgar cared so little for the feelings and opinions of Mr. Olave Harpsden, that before the worthy stepmother had half finished her panegyric, he was on his way to Harrals Hall.

With Netta, his task was far more difficult. To the kinswoman of poor Kit, it was easy to express unqualified sympathy. From Netta, he had to conceal not only the danger of Lord Dinton, but the evil influence exercised by her father throughout the transaction.

Without asking to see Mrs. Wroughton, he made his way, therefore, direct to the morning room, where the two girls were occupied, Miss Wraysbury in drawing, her cousin in reading aloud to her. And pleasant for a moment was it to his harassed feelings to find the drawing pencils thrown down, and Netta eagerly seizing his hands, with a welcome such as she had never accorded to him before. — Even Hilda turned towards him with looks of earnest good-will. For the first time in their long cousinship, she greeted him as Edgar.

"How good of you to come! — We wanted so much to see you!" burst simultaneously from the lips of both. — But there was no need for Netta to speak.

In her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear,
As pebbles in a brook.

"You will, perhaps, wish that I had stayed away when you hear what sad news I have brought you," said he, reluctant to overcloud those fair bright faces with the sad realities of life.

"It is true, then?" — cried Miss Wraysbury, dropping his hand. "There has been a report in the house, arising from the servants' hall, that Mr. Harpsden's unfortunate nephew was dangerously ill."

"Would it were no worse. He is *dead*, Netta! — And would even *that* were the worst."

Already, Hilda Wroughton had sunk into a chair, and sat pale and motionless. — But Netta's trembling hand was on his arm, with her eyes riveted interrogatively upon his face.

"My poor uncle, who caught the infection from this *protégé* of yours, when he visited him last week, is in the utmost danger."

"Don't say so, oh! don't say so, — *don't*, Edgar. Think of poor dear Bessy. — Think of all of us!"

"I can think only of *him!* — But I have not a moment to lose; I am off to Denny Cross to prepare them. — What I came here for, dear Netta, was to ask you to go immediately to my poor aunts, who are

almost beside themselves. They want somebody to write for them, and think for them, and above all, to comfort them."

"This very moment," cried Miss Wraysbury, ringing to order the carriage. "But if you meet my Aunt Wroughton, Edgar, before you leave the house, say not a word of all this; or she might object to our going to an infected house."

"If all communication were not cut off between the sick room and the rest of the Castle, do you imagine that I should ask it? — And what do you mean by 'our' going? — I am on horseback. I cannot accompany you."

Miss Wraysbury glanced in an embarrassed manner towards Hilda. They were now so constantly together, that it seemed a matter of course for her cousin to accompany her on her errand of mercy.

"A stranger would be an incumbrance at such a moment," said he, replying to her look with his usual straight-forwardness.

"And I am going where comfort is equally needed," said Hilda, rising and preparing to leave the room; "where, though a stranger, I shall be welcome."

"You are going *where*, dearest cousin?" — said Netta, following her to the door.

"To the Rectory," — she replied with a haughty smile; regardless of the contemptuous ejaculation of her cousin Edgar.

CHAPTER V.

THAT month of February, so full of promise in England, so treacherous in performance, passed pleasantly and hopefully in Italy. In Rome, more especially, the Carnival was unusually brilliant. — A few exotic royalties had made the ancient city their halting place for the winter, instead of proceeding to Naples: — partly because, the Neapolitan Court being in august mourning, a crape veil overhung the higher class of its usually brilliant society; — partly because, in addition to the cultivation of the Fine Arts, an accademia for the encouragement of the Coarse had been recently established. The campagna had now, in rivalship with Melton, its crack pack of foxhounds; and the music of the view halloo carried the day against the notes of San Carlo.

Among the most officious of the Great British sportsmen who officiated in the organization of the new hunt, was Gerald Molyneux, — old Molyneux, alas! as he began to be called by the youngsters, — Harrovian and Oxonian contemporaries of his son. Among these incipient Nimrods, he was a great authority: — born in the heart of the Pytchley, and baptized, at riper years, in the waters of the Whis-

senden brook. He was consequently in the highest spirits; and his means having been nearly doubled by the recent death of his father, his hospitalities were as bright as his hunting coat.

Old Molyneux prided himself on having it said that his dinners were the best in Rome. — Every body has an ambition. That of his wife was to have her *soirées* frequented by the best Italian society, sprinkled with the more renowned of those rising artists, who promise to perpetuate the halo that consecrates almost as much as devotional feelings, the dome of St. Peter's, or halls of the Vatican. But the Honourable Gerald delighted far more in red coats than red petticoats, — in top-boots than in purple stockings; — and it was *his* glory that the stable should afford the leading topic of conversation at those *recherché* feasts, whose claret and champagne were as undeniable as if drunk at the Trois Frères, or the table of Reuben Howard.

"The fact is, my dear Emma," confided the old beau to his wife, — "we cannot establish ourselves too snugly. For here we are naturalized as completely as ever Craven was at Naples, or Hertford at Paris. — I *used* to fancy there might come a time for our residing in England. But, by Jove! as things have turned out, I don't care if I never see the white cliffs of Dover again!"

"A couple of months in London, now and then,

however, make a pleasant change," said Mrs. Molyneux, languidly. "And Theo., like all girls brought up abroad, is absurdly curious about her native country. 'The island' as she calls it — as Hampshire people do the Isle of Wight!"

"Theo. talks like a very silly girl. — But on the other hand, she rides like an angel," said old Molyneux, arranging his whiskers with a pocket comb. — "And *that*, she would of course enjoy to perfection in England, — the only place where a decent lady's horse is to be had. — But as I was saying just now, I shall never wish to set foot again in Molyneux Castle, when its honours are done by that confounded Denny Cross dairy-maid."

"It is strange we do not hear from Edgar," observed Mrs. Molyneux. "Theo. and I appear to-night in colours at the Austrian embassy, for the first time these six months; — plain proof that the marriage must be on the eve of solemnization. Half-a-year, you know, was to be the period of probation."

"Better keep on your mourning six months longer, then, in honour of the wedding," retorted old Molyneux, peevishly. — "A Bessy Pennington established at the Castle, and Clara Wroughton in Carlton Gardens, are enough to make one forswear one's country, and turn Mormon or Mussulman."

"With all my heart!" said his wife, amused by *his petulance*. "But *en attendant*, we must try to af-

ford poor Theo. a season in town. — The Grandisons have bewildered her little head with accounts of the frantic gaiety of a London June."

"I should have fancied that the frantic gaiety of an Italian Carnival might have sufficed her. And those Grandisons only make up to her because they hope to obtain, through us, a better footing at Lynchcombe. — Confoundedly mistaken! If they were up in our family politics, they would know that no *passe partout*, given by a member of his own family, is likely to open the house or heart of Sir John."

"One can't tell. — Dinton wrote you word that Edgar got on very well with him."

"Edgar gets on with every body. — His easy, facile manners render him difficult to repulse. I defy even your brother to brutalize Edgar."

"Let us hope that the heiress of Lynchcombe will be equally propitious," — his wife was beginning; when a girlish voice was heard in the adjoining room, and the door flew open to admit a merry dancing figure, bright as a gleam of sunshine; — their daughter Theodosia, attired in the prettiest of pink ball-dresses, just completed for the evening's fête. In either hand, she held two beautiful coiffures of roses; one pink, one white; between which, she wanted her mother to decide.

"Choose for me, — I can't make up my foolish mind," said she, gaily.

"White," — replied old Molyneux.

"Pink," — said his wife.

On which Theo., hovering like a butterfly between them, insisted upon marking her deference to both, by wearing neither. "The Grandisons had often told her she looked better with nothing in her hair." And the ripply, wavy, chesnut curls were shaken playfully from her brow, in conscious beauty, as she spoke; deaf to her father's inquiries of "*which* of the Grandisons?" For *one* of them passed for a favoured adorer of his daughter.

"Do you know, mother," said she, when the obsolete dandy, who was endeavouring to rough-cast the ruins of his good looks into a semblance of sportsmanship, had quitted the room with an oath or two of disgust at the frivolity of his woman-kind, "Do you know it makes me melancholy, to see myself tricked out in gay colours again. It brings poor grandpapa and the old castle strangely before me! — I can just fancy my aunts crying their eyes out at having to exchange *their* black gowns for bridal finery."

"And so they ought; for they have been the prime movers of this disgraceful match," said Mrs. Molyneux, surveying her daughter's draperies complacently through her *lorgnette*.

"Why *disgraceful*, Mamma? — I was always fond of Aunt Wraysbury. The only sister of hers I can

recollect, was named Sophia. But Edgar writes me word, Lady Dinton is worth them both put together."

"Lady Dinton!" exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux impatiently. But it was not to her daughter she could admit how confidently she had herself looked forward to bearing the name.

"How I should like to see them all again," said the young Hebe, — in whose mind her pink gown seemed to have called up a train of pleasant reminiscences. — "They were all very good to me. The old castle was as *triste* as St. Angelo. — Yet I was always happy there."

"Children are happy anywhere."

"Not they, dear Mamma. I used to hate London; — that everlasting square — those tiresome drives in the park!"

"Yet even London, you sometimes express a wish to see again."

"Yes, as a sight — not as a home. — I want a peep at its great men and public buildings. — I want to buy a three-pommel saddle, and a box of water-colours. — Edgar is wild for us to go over for a few months, this spring. If it were not for the Easter fêtes in perspective, I should wonder how you and papa could absent yourselves from the wedding. But if one of my uncles, — either Lord Dinton or Sir John, — should invite you to stay with them in London, dear mother, *do* go — do *pray* go! I should so

very, very much like to see whether English people are as dull and silent in their own world, as they are when on their travels. Berty Grandison declares that they are ten times worse; and that London society is like a magic lantern, with the light omitted by particular desire."

"English society, dull or cheerful, signifies as little to *you*, Theo., as that of St. Petersburg! This match of your uncle's has built up a great wall of China, between us and our own country. As to a season's visit to London, what purpose could it possibly serve, except to unsettle and mortify you, by bringing you forward in *la queue de la comète* — a mere satellite of the heiress of Lynchcombe!"

"*Pourvu qu'on s'amuse?*" — cried the gay girl. — "And why should I feel humbled by having a cousin richer than myself? — There are compensations for all things. In some respect or other, I am probably her superior: — though Berty Grandison declares that I am not worthy to hold a lucifer match to Netta Wraysbury; and Edgar is always writing about her naïveté and warmth of heart."

Thus frank and genuine in nature, the absence of all envious feeling afforded an additional charm to the sunny face of Theodosia.

The Romans, however, called her Titian's daughter rather than by her own name; for to that celebrated portrait she bore considerable resemblance. — Like

her brother Edgar, she was a buoyant, happy creature; and though to be dowerless in a country where the equi-distribution of fortunes places a penny in every pouch, precluded the possibility of a suitable matrimonial establishment, it did not prevent her having more partners and *proneurs* than any other of the Anglo-Roman belles.

That night, more especially, — the first time she had been seen out of her unbecoming suit of sables, — the enthusiasm in her favour was universal; nor did the buds of the beautiful bouquet she held in her hand, rival the glow which gratified vanity called into her smiling cheeks.

"Miss Molyneux would be thought nothing of in her own country," was Mrs. Grandison's insidious reply to the enthusiastic admiration expressed by the old Duke of Villa Hermosa. "The want of *retenu* admired here, because it is so unusual, and which passes for artlessness, is too common among English girls *de pur sang* to be even noticed in London."

"Beauty is beauty, whatever climate may produce it," replied the duke, who had glided past the well-dressed, well-trained Miss Grandison, with the cold respect of *les trois saluts d'usage*. — "And see! how lovely and animated she looks, just now, her eyes sparkling, and the colour mantling in her cheeks, — like a startled nymph in some picture of one of our great masters."

Mrs. Grandison, who always pinched up her countenance and deportment into a certain air of prudish continental good breeding whenever she assumed her Murray, ugly, and railway bag, for a foreign tour, — looked extremely shocked at the comparison.

"Miss Molyneux seems out of sorts, certainly. — Some little quarrel, probably, between her and her partner, my eldest son."

"A suspicious circumstance, between two such handsome young people!" said the duke, good-humouredly.

The lady of Blandhurst replied only by an accelerated exercise of her fan. But had she been talking to one of her fox-hunting countrymen instead of to a high-bred old grandee of Spain, she would probably have indulged in the hateful jargon current among great British chaperons, concerning the obvious desire of Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux to "catch" the heir of Blandhurst.

It sufficed to her wounded pride to hint that the brother of Miss Molyneux, now in England, was an admirer of her daughter Maude, which produced a sort of brother and sister acquaintance between Albert and Theodosia.

"But surely, *chère Madame*," persisted the old duke, "it can hardly be a brotherly and sisterly intimacy that has brought so vivid a glow into the cheeks of that beautiful girl, as she listens to the whispers of

her partner? — And see! she is now as pale as death! — And now, — heaven bless me, — in tears! What can he have said to her? — Ha! she is hurrying away to her mother; who, after listening to her exclamations, seems as much agitated as herself."

"How provoking that I cannot obtain a sight of them!" exclaimed Mrs. Grandison, envying the advantage enjoyed by the tall old duke. "What *can* be the matter?"

And piously did she trust that the pretty pink ball-dress worn by his still prettier country-woman might not have proved too much for the resolution of her dear Berty. — If he should have been making a fool of himself! — A marriage with old Molyneux's dowerless daughter would be ruin to one whose upshot price in the matrimonial market was at least thirty thousand pounds; and for a month past, she had been prudently but not very courteously endeavouring to break off her long-established intimacy with the family. "It is so provoking that in these stuffy crowds," said she, peevishly addressing her companion, "one can neither see nor breathe."

And on his polite offer to give her his arm through the throng, she made her panting way towards the refreshment-room, expecting to find her dear Berty in the act of administering a glass of iced-water to one, if not both, the ladies whom he had excited to such a state of agitation.

She met him in the doorway, looking startled and cross. — But as there was no young lady on his arm, and the duke, her gallant cavalier, spoke no English, she ventured to whisper, "I trust in goodness, Berty, you have not been committing yourself by a proposal to Miss Molyneux?"

"On the contrary, I have just been taking her to her carriage. It is a pity, mother, you were not at hand to wish her good bye."

"Good bye? — When I shall probably see her to-morrow?"

"Not for many to-morrows. — In a few hours, she starts with her family for England."

"For England? — *Theo. Molyneux?*"

"Lady Theodosia, if you please, my dear mother. — News has arrived this evening in a letter from Reuben Howard to the Hanoverian Minister, of the sudden death of Lord Dinton. To my great surprise, I was the first to communicate it to the family."

Fain would Mrs. Grandison have rushed off in pursuit of the new countess and her daughter. — But it was too late to move an amendment. — The carriage had already driven from the door.

CHAPTER VI.

The destiny of one man appears to be regulated by the moment hand, — that of another, by the hour-hand, of the great dial of Eternity. The poor old squire at Denny Cross scarcely more than half alive, was still among the living; but the active, — the energetic, — the great, — the good, — the generous Lord Dinton had indeed ceased to exist. All was over: — a benefactor lost to his species, — an idol to his home.

So rapid had been the progress of that terrible malady, that the first alarm was scarcely circulated in the Castle and its environs, before the worst was known. — The passing bell of the village church conveyed to many the first intimation of his seizure.

From the first, everything had been attempted that art could suggest. — But, as has been remarked by one of the wisest of our time, "while all ordinary diseases appear to yield more and more to our increased knowledge, pestilential diseases seem reserved by God for his own purposes, and to baffle as completely our power to meet them, as in the earliest ages of the world."*

* Dr. Arnold's Letters.

That Lord Dinton died of a pestilential disease, the most contradictory of his friends did not deny. — The only question to be solved, was, whether it were typhus, endemic in the district; or simply the gaol-fever created by that cruel parsimony of penal legislators, which, from the days of John Howard at Kherson, to those of John Bull at Millbank, has hurried so many individuals into the grave.

But without entering into this hygienic question, stormily discussed, just then, among the magistrates paid and unpaid of the county of North Hants, it is necessary, even at the cost of a miserably gloomy chapter, to resume our chain of events from the hurried departure of the two cousins from the court-yard of Harrals.

They had not been gone more than an hour, — Miss Wraysbury in her father's carriage, — Hilda on foot, unaccompanied, and wrapt in the first rough cloak she could snatch up in the hall, — when Sir John, in all the vague ill-humour of a chilled and hungry traveller, made his appearance.

At no time remarkable for the humility of his deportment, he was now peculiarly inflated by a sense of his personal importance, from his recent visit to Lynchcombe; which might be termed his seat of wealth, as Westminster the seat of empire. That was his throne, "let squires come bow to it;" his throne, from which he reigned over a fortune of seventy thousand

per annum. Harrals, and the Barony of Fitz-Alwyne *in nubibus*, were, by comparison, as the shell to the oyster.

"Where is Netta?" was his first exclamation to his sister, whom he found seated quietly in her widow's weeds in her own especial corner of the drawing-room sofa, working diligently at some interminable piece of knitting, as women sometimes do when the dearest interests of life are tossing about around them on the troubled waves of life, in imminent peril of wreck.

"The girls are both out," was her composed reply.

"At this late hour?" he angrily rejoined, — for daylight was fast waning.

"They are not together. — Netta is gone to Molyneux Castle, — Hilda into the village."

"But was not my daughter aware that I was expected home to-day?"

"Both of them appear to have gone suddenly distracted. — They went off, without apprizing me."

"How then do you know where they are gone?"

"Helmsley informed me that Miss Wraysbury ordered the coachman to drive to Molyneux Castle as fast as his horses could take her. He added, without my asking, that Miss Wroughton had been seen hurrying towards the Rectory."

"The Rectory, — Harrals Rectory?" repeated Sir John in his surliest voice, as if fancying that his ears deceived him.

"Why it certainly seems improbable. She is aware of your interdiction. And the only one of the family with whom she is acquainted, my nephew Olave, has not been at home since our arrival."

"You *are* acquainted with him, then?"

"Two years ago, when he came on a tour of inspection to Joachimsthal and other educational establishments of Germany, he spent a few days with us at Frankfort, both in coming and returning. — My poor husband detested him."

"Then what can have induced Miss Wroughton to brave my displeasure by visiting his family — strangers to her — strangers to us all; — and to *me* most offensive?"

"To say the truth, there is a report in the house — But I scarcely like to tell you," continued Mrs. Wroughton, proceeding to count the stitches of her knitting.

"Of what are you afraid, Clara? Pray speak out," said Sir John, assuming a voice of encouragement, but looking awful as the Maelstrom.

"A report that Mr. Harpsden's nephew, whom you committed, — that is, who was committed by one of Lord Marington's sons, for poaching in your preserves," — said she, correcting herself, on perceiving her brother's brow contract to a still more gloomy shade.

"Well — well! — To the point, to the point!"

"That he is dead in prison."

Sir John started. It was not *that* announcement for which he was prepared. He had expected to hear of his escape.

"And that the other lad — —"

"His accomplice?"

"Is in the infirmary, and in the greatest danger: — from typhus, or cholera, or some other of those dreadful gaol epidemics."

"But what possible connexion is there between the life or death of a couple of ruffians of that class, and my daughter's flying off alone to Molyneux Castle?" inquired Sir John, drawing up and endeavouring to rally his spirits; though the whiteness of his lips betrayed his inward agitation.

"I really wish it had *not*, brother. — But pray ring for Helmsley, and inquire of *him* what has transpired about this unfortunate business. — You seem so angry, that I hardly like to talk to you about it. — Yet surely I am not to blame?"

"*Much* to blame, — for listening to vulgar gossip, probably from your maid."

"No indeed," faltered Mrs. Wroughton, taunted into self-betrayal: — "it was from Dysart that I heard it."

In a moment, the bell was rung with a vehemence that caused the newly-laid cylinders to resound like cymbals; and Mrs. Dysart was hastily summoned.

Concluding that she was wanted to receive orders concerning some branch of domestic economy connected with her master's recent visit to Lynchcombe, the mother of the maids came rustling and bustling in. — But the expression of Sir John Wraysbury's face checked her simpers in a moment.

"What is this you have been telling my sister, Mrs. Dysart, about a typhus fever?" said he, fiercely; — alluding, of course, to the fate of Kit Bothamley and his confederates.

"Why, begging your pardon, Sir John, they *do* say, — that is Tandy, the under-groom, when he rode in for the letter-bag this afternoon, brought back a report, — that — that —"

"Speak out, woman!" — cried her master, in tones wholly new to the ears polite of the voluminous housekeeper, — who was thereby roused to bitterness fully equal to his own.

"That Lord Dinton, Sir, when he visited young Bothamley in gaol, in order to obtain his release, took the infection from the unfortunate young man, and is now at the worst, — not like to live through the night."

The angry man had indeed brought down an avalanche on his head! — Still, the first feeling that overpowered him was not that of remorse.

"The infection? — Malignant typhus?" faltered he,

almost speechless from consternation. "And Netta at the Castle!"

"Just what I said, Sir," observed Mrs. Dysart, gathering courage from his dismay. "I was making the remark to Mr. Helmsley at the very moment your bell rung. — But in course," glancing spitefully at Mrs. Wroughton, "nobody here had no authority to prevent Miss Wraysbury rushing into such danger."

Sir John was no longer listening. He was summing up in his mind the details of the case. — The heiress of all his wealth in danger of her life, by proximity to gaol fever. His interference, perhaps, already too late. — Lynchcombe, the palace wherein last night his soul had taken its ease, looking forward to the dominion of its posterity, doomed to the ascendancy of a vulgar Liverpool money-spinner, talking broad Lancashire and wearing double-soled boots: — a man who would probably convert its beautiful gardens into potato grounds, and make broom-sticks of his plantations!

Such was his first view of the case. His second, an accidental glance having lighted on Netta's work-box, as it lay open and disordered on her little table, — a piece of half-finished embroidery hanging from it, as if hastily thrown down at the moment of departure, — his second, regarded himself, left lonely by the loss of that sweet companion. For ten years to come, Harry would be nothing to him. And in ten

years, his own three-score would be more than accomplished.

So rapid is the glance of the human mind, that all this and more had passed through the selfish soul of the millionary, and Mrs. Dysart was still lingering near the door, waiting for dismissal. Mrs. Wroughton, albeit unused to the imperative mood, was about, indeed, to take pity on her embarrassment, and tell her she might go; when her master suddenly bade her order his carriage to be got ready directly.

"What coachman, what carriage, if you please, Sir John?" said the circumstantial woman in authority. "Digges and the chariot are with Miss Wraysbury; the brougham and John Hastings went for you to the rail —"

"No matter what, — no matter which, — the brougham with a fresh horse, — Hastings, or the head groom to drive. But *immediately!*"

She was gone in a moment; but though Mrs. Wroughton went knitting on, she was becoming almost as much agitated as himself.

"You cannot surely be going to the Castle, my dear brother," said she; "tired and hungry as you must be. Wait at least, till after dinner; Netta will probably return to dinner; you will only cross her on the road."

A prediction which appeared highly probable.

"Had not my niece intended to return," added

Mrs. Wroughton, "she would have sent back the carriage."

Sir John could not but agree with her. Arguments drawn from the material business of life, convey the surest conviction. Again he rang the bell. "He would wait till after dinner; but it must be served to a moment."

It *was* served to a moment, — after the usual ceremonial of dressing-bell and serving-bell; — to the former of which, an unusual omission in that house of forms, no attention was paid, excepting in the point device white cravat of Helmsley.

The dinner, too, came and went unheeded. — The *purée*, the *filets*, the *salmi*, — "the saddle of mutton, Sir John, on the side table," might have been the paste-board properties of a stage-supper, for any enjoyment they afforded.

At length, when the dessert was brought into the room, Sir John looked anxiously at his watch, and again ordered the carriage. "She will not come *now*," said he, half aside, to his sister.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, are you not aware that the carriage has returned from Molyneux Castle?" interposed Helmsley; "Miss Wraysbury sleeps there to-night."

"Why the devil was not the message brought to me before?" cried his angry master.

"It was scarcely a message, Sir John. Only an

intimation to Miss Wraysbury's maid. There was a note, — there were *two* notes."

"Bring them here directly, then."

"They are gone, Sir. One was to Miss Wroughton, addressed to the Rectory; the other to Mr. Farmer, at Denny Cross; the coachman had orders from Miss Wraysbury's own lips, to send off an express with it, the very moment he arrived."

The indignant Baronet was now becoming all but frantic. All this business transacting in his house; and he, not so much as consulted!

Perceiving his master's excited state of mind, Helmsley, in his most confidential and deprecatory tones, ventured to suggest that "Miss Wraysbury was evidently unaware of the return home of Sir John." But Sir John knew better. *His* habits were as punctual as became a man who transacts his own business. Netta must have been as sure that he was by that time at Harrals, as that the sun, though invisible, was in the sky.

"Write a line, Clara, to your daughter," said he, abruptly addressing Mrs. Wroughton; "and bid her return home immediately. The carriage can fetch her before I use it."

"Miss Wroughton *is* at home, Sir John — she came in while you were at dinner. A gentleman (Mr. Harpsden, I fancy) escorted her to the door. I met her in the vestibule, and mentioned that you

were dining. But she was ill, she said, and would go at once to her room."

How much more was the man of millions to learn from servants? — he who, on system, avoided all intercourse with them not strictly connected with their calling.

"Go to your daughter, my dear Clara," said he, more mildly, "and find out the exact purport of her cousin's message. I shall take no steps till I hear more."

But when Mrs. Wroughton and the obsequious Helmsley had both disappeared, came thronging thoughts which it was not easy to stifle. The idea of Netta passing the evening and night in the house of sickness, brought her before him in her capacity of the tenderest of nurses. Without pausing to reflect upon the impossibility that she should employ herself about the sick-bed of Lord Dinton, as she had done about his own, he fancied her keeping watch in the infected room, holding drink to the parched lips of the sufferer; and fainting dead, as he had seen her do, from over-watchfulness, after a night of vigil.

Even these engrossing visions, however, did not exclude the one dread thought that a certain rich man was the author of all this evil. If those unhappy lads, — those boyish offenders, — had been hurried into eternity, it was his doing. — If, for the value of a few hares or pheasants more or less to augment

the sum-total of his game-lists, he had condemned two thoughtless boys to the demoralizing influence of a gaol, on his head was the responsibility. — If it pleased God to remove Lord Dinton, it was because, as the champion of the oppressed, he had, in their defence, gone forth as a true knight; and, in spite of his armour of righteousness, fallen a victim!

Of Denny Cross, hard as he was, he scarcely liked to think; not so much on account of the gentle woman lonely by its hearthside, — after all her life of self-devotion, sacrificed and broken-hearted at last; as because he knew that Roger Farmer, whose keen and searching perceptions he regarded as secondary only to the eye of Omniscience, was seated there in judgment upon his petty motives: saying within himself — "John Woolston has proved, as I foresaw, a slave of Mammon: — unequal to the responsibilities of his lofty position; — unworthy the still mightier blessings of domestic peace."

The intelligence brought by Mrs. Wroughton from her daughter's room, was not calculated to dissipate these appalling reflections. — Netta had addressed to her cousin only as many words as would convey that nothing but a miracle could save the suffering man.

"Pray for us, dear Hilda," said the latter, "and bid the Harpsdens pray for him, for it was in *their* service he incurred his doom. — I am here as in

quarantine; Edgar is not permitted to visit us. — Luckily for *him;* for the anguish of those two poor sisters, of whose lives Lord Dinton has been the ruling influence, is terrible to witness. — The grief of his dear old mother is as dignified as it is touching; probably, because aware that she shall soon rejoin him in a land where the tears will be wiped from off all faces. — They have given me the room prepared for grandpapa — as being furthest from the infected wing. But poor grandpapa will never inhabit it. — As to Aunt Bessy. — But I dare not yet think of her. — Hilda, — dear Hilda — Why did I write that fatal, *fatal* letter!"

And not one thought of her father! The dying man, — the family at the Castle, — the bedridden old squire, — the sorrowing betrothed, — the dowager, — the weeping sisters, — even those people at the Rectory, had mention, — and *he* was utterly forgotten! —

Was this his dutiful Netta? Was this the child whose professions had been so fond? Alas! — was not the fault his own? Had he not repulsed her entreaties as she all but knelt at his feet, soliciting his clemency towards the Ash Bank delinquent; or did she apply for poor Lord Dinton's assistance, till she found him utterly inexorable? Had he not hurried off into Dorsetshire chiefly to avoid a renewal of her solicitations? — Had he not even cruelly reproached

her with indifference to his care over the interests of her brother's future estate, only because she felt herself so much superior to poor Harry, as the future heiress of Lynchcombe? —

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGHOUT that miserable evening, did Mrs. Wroughton pursue her task of knitting, as though the round world were revolving smoothly in its orbit, and all the human atoms haunting its surface pursuing their usual avocations; though, in reality, she would have given worlds to go and interrogate her daughter more closely concerning the sorrows of the Rectory, and terrors of the Castle.

But she dared not leave her brother. Though they exchanged not a word, she felt that he must wish to have some sort of companionship; — so plain was it, from his starts of restlessness, that he was sorely tried. — Once or twice, she attempted to talk to him of Lynchcombe; hazarding inquiries concerning an aquarium, which, when they quitted the place, was in process of being added to the conservatory. But no answer could she obtain, beyond monosyllables recklessly applied. Sir John, usually so tenacious concerning his possessions, and so fond of enlarging on his improvements, listened as though he heard not. — Starting, every now and then, from his seat, he began to pace the room, whose dimensions afforded ample scope for an unquiet footstep; and once, instead

of resuming his accustomed place on the sofa, he rushed to the window, and drawing aside the heavy damask curtains, unbarred the shutter, and peered out into the darkness. Perhaps he was reflecting on the dreary hours of watchfulness which, at that moment, were, for so many, fraught with anguish.

"Late as it is, I am half inclined to drive over to Denny Cross," said he, suddenly addressing his sister. — "*There* they must know more than two girls like Netta and Hilda are likely to have been entrusted with."

A creature of ceremony, Mrs. Wroughton suggested the untimeliness of such a visit. — "It would be nearly ten o'clock before he got there. The family would have retired to bed."

As if there were bed-time that night for any one bearing the name of Pennington!

"Surely," added she, "if you wish for further information, it would be better to send at once to the Castle? — The distance is nearly the same."

"Two hours ago, I dispatched a messenger with a letter to Edgar. Another, half-an-hour since, (when tea was brought in,) to see what delayed the return of the first."

"You seem really very uneasy, my dear John," said Mrs. Wroughton, again counting her stitches. — "But depend upon it, my niece's anxiety has exaggerated the state of the case. — How many people

get through the typhus fever! Quite as many as fall victims to it. Particularly in Lord Dinton's class of life, — well clothed, well fed, and well attended. — Quite a different case from that of the two poachers. (Thirteen, and pass over two.)"

Had one syllable she uttered reached his ear, he would probably have felt inclined to snatch her unmeaning strip of work out of her hand, and fling it on the floor. — But all he seemed to hear were the words written by his daughter: — "His state is desperate, — he cannot live through the night."

If one of his messengers would only return and bring word that there was the slightest shade of amendment!

During one of his sister's more anxious investigation of her stitches, he *had* indeed written a few hasty lines to Hugh Pennington, and sent them off to Denny Cross; so that even if his grooms were detained at the Castle by the confusion of the moment, from the quiet household of the old squire he was certain of a reply.

He was so far right, that the messenger to Denny Cross was the first to return. But, alas! it was only to bring back his letter. — Mr. Hugh and Mr. Farmer had been away at Lord Dinton's since the afternoon. Mrs. Farmer was with her sister. None of the old servants would hear of breaking in upon their grief. — For all now knew the worst. — The anxieties of

the conscience-struck Sir John must remain unappeased.

But while he continued to pace his gorgeous saloons, — now shuddering with cold, beside a blazing fire, — now retreating from its heat to the still uncurtained window, where he seemed to be interrogating the quiet stars, shining so serenely as if in mockery of his cares, — the overcharged hearts at Denny Cross were still patient. Their burthen was indeed heavy; — but the heaviest are often the most bravely borne.

From the moment Edgar's last express arrived, summoning Farmer and his brother-in-law to afford him their advice and support, and bidding them prepare the mind of Bessy for the grievous news that could not be long withheld, Miss Pennington, after one single outburst of grief and horror, had subsided into a sort of lethargy. — Scarcely lethargy, however; for every faculty was poignantly sensitive. But the blood seemed to have forsaken her veins, — so waxen white were her face and hands. Nor could the slightest variation of expression be detected in her vacant eyes. — Grief appeared to have paralyzed her external frame, only to impart a sensibility more exquisite to every fibre of her heart.

She had proposed, in a steady though scarcely audible voice, to Mrs. Farmer, that they should go and sit by her father's bed-side: as if she considered *that* the stronghold of her life — the altar from which

her prayers were likeliest to be heard. — The old man lay, as usual, calm, impassive, and unconscious of their presence. — But in *their* hearts what tumults of care!

Mrs. Farmer was too wise to disturb by formal exhortations her sister's saintly frame of mind. She left her wholly to herself. Only holding her cold hand fondly enclasped; to denote to her now and then, by a kindly pressure, that there was one watching beside her in that darkened room, who sympathized in every pulsation of her heart.

Towards day-light, Mrs. Farmer rose and led her sister, unresisting as a child, from the room, and as she had often done *as* a child, undressed her and placed her in bed. Terrible was it for poor Sophia to see the woman but two days before so radiant with hope and happiness, prostrated by this sudden blow almost into the helpless state of her father. She soon sank off to sleep, — or to an insensibility that looked like sleep. — And when, towards noon, Farmer returned, haggard and wretched, having left his brother-in-law at the Castle, as some stay and comfort to poor Edgar, her curtains were still drawn.

There was, luckily, as yet no need to apprize her that all was over! —

CHAPTER VIII.

Like the Marmite Perpétuelle, which is said to have been simmering from year's end to year's end, in Paris, for many centuries past, there exists in London, — there existed in Samuel Pepys' time, in Horace Walpole's, in Brummell's — in the time, in short, of all those searchers into the nonsenses of life which govern its graver interests, as a puff of wind, governing the wind-mill, serves to create the staff of life, — some individual whose consequence is of the most gratuitous kind, whose abilities are of the most inferential; — but to whom, in the various exigencies of life, people seem to have come to a conclusion to refer for counsel.

Never a first-rate man. A first-rate man is a noun-substantive, who has enough to do with the regulation of his own affairs, and the enjoyment of his own position. But usually one who runs a good second: — a younger son of some noble family, with an income that enables him to give a few good dinners, entitling him to many in return. — Above all, what old Johnson would have called "a clubbable man;" — addicted to much gossip; endowed with a good memory, a good digestion, and a bad heart.

In the day of Sir John Wraysbury and the Dintons, Reuben Howard, — the *Honourable* Reuben, was the man; who having passed over the burning ploughshares of turf and gaming-table without a singe, was entitled to the name generally assigned him of a man of the nicest honour. — He had dabbled, too, in politics, — such politics as are created by the rinsings of many administrations; and was as closely connected with the higher order of the press, as the patent hinge to the swing-door, with which it sways backwards and forwards, while appearing to govern its oscillations.

Now, Reuben, a man who had long contemplated the British Constitution as consisting of Clubs, Press, Queen, Lords, and Commons, now that he had somewhat survived the pleasanter illusions of life, and that the political interests of the country had outgrown his ken, (so that when he attempted a Cabinet intrigue, he looked like a superannuated groom run away with by a powerful horse to which he has pretended to give a gallop,) condescended a little more than in his hot youth to private legislation. If, as was said of him, he had never lost an enemy or gained a friend, no man in the three kingdoms had so extensive an acquaintance or ruled it with so masterly a hand.

This was partly the result of a certain tact, the spontaneous growth of the Upper Alps of society; and partly of the friction of the busy world, in which I

had been rolling for half a century, like the polished steel ball vibrating in one of the clocks of Sir William Congreve.

But it made him an incomparable referee in all those matters of pleasure which, westward of Temple Bar, pass for matters of business; such as disputed debts of honour, — uncertain bets, — political pledges sneakingly withdrawn, — a duel to be fought (or evaded), — a divorce to be obtained (or evaded): — a shabby transaction to be varnished over, or a disgraceful quarrel to be patched up.

If, as he was sometimes called, one of the patent mouchards of society, Reuben Howard had done infinite good in his generation, as, if not exactly a peace-maker, a suppressor of public scandals. He had healed as many wounds distressing to the public as Holloway's ointment; and set as many broken reputations, as Astley Cooper limbs. A valuable member of the society of the Upper Two Thousand: always ready to applaud what was likely to pass for good or brilliant, or groan down what was foredoomed to unpopularity. His long-experienced eye foresaw a star in the West. He could detect a great reputation in its swaddling clothes; and be the first to bow down and worship.

On the other hand, he had, of course, disciples of his own; confederates and twaddlers of his own class and kind; monsterers of nothings, who had bribed

their way into notice, — some by money, — some by wit, — some by a frog-like self-inflation into semblance of the ox that typifies John Bull. But, compared with Reuben, they were all impostors. They wanted his good-breeding, his cold-bloodedness, and his genius for concentrating his faculties on the prevailing topic of the day, like a policeman's bull's-eye turned upon a burglar. — They might emulate his faculty of knowing every man-worth-knowing's affairs and pedigree, better than he knew them himself. But not a greybeard of the titled herd understood like Reuben Howard, when such knowledge might be paraded, or when it should be suppressed.

Such was the individual who had been the privy-councillor of Gerald Molyneux in days when he had occasionally to compromise with some creditor, to shoot some injured husband, or out-perjure some injured woman or horse-dealer; and who, having often saved him by judicious advice from an irretrievable stumble on the banks of that mysterious receptacle of decayed reputations, known as "the dogs," — "the bad," — or "Coventry," — commanded proportionate gratitude.

Having so often received absolution and plenary indulgence at the hands of Reuben, it was not wonderful that his acolyte should consider him infallible. And such, therefore, was the Pope, in whose hands, on arriving at the Clarendon, the new Earl of Dinton deposited his conscience.

His objects in life considered, he could not, perhaps, have chosen better. For old Reuben was intrinsically a gentleman. — Nor could he have selected a pleasanter Gamaliel. For with *him* there was no need of hypocritical pretence at fraternal affliction. Reuben was aware that the last Lord Dinton and the present had been as Jacob and Esau. — Nor did he personally pretend to share the regrets which had thrown a whole district of Northamptonshire into tears. As a schoolfellow and a brother Oxonian, he had always pitied, in the late lord, what he termed, "the miserable insignificance of poor Wilchester." Even his moral qualities appeared to Reuben home-baked and heavy: — mutton instead of venison; served up with virtues, adapted to a white-washed cottage, not to a tapestried palace. His face was as unfamiliar at White's, as Canning's at the Alfred: even at the political clubs, he was a stranger; and such a man was neither of his times, nor of his Order. His death was the origin of no legerdemain at Newmarket. Announced at Tattersalls, no one would have referred to his book: — nor was there a ballot the more in St. James's Street for his vacant place. — Decidedly, there was no drawback on any reasonable man's satisfaction in welcoming back Gerald Molyneux to the scenes of his dupehood, by the style and title of Earl of Dinton.

But after as intimate a scrutiny of the outward

man of the new Earl, as decency would allow, (but Reuben Howard was one of those practised observers who see things at a single glance,) the layer-down of Club-law was almost tempted to exclaim, like Lear, against the "sophistication" of his visitor.

The new Earl, having paused at Paris to relieve himself and his family after the fatigues of their hurried journey, and prepare them for their re-appearance on the London stage, his hat and wig were ultra Parisian; and every body conversant with the *Mystères de Paris et de Londres*, — as connected with the toilet, — will admit that the well-dressed man of the Jockey Club, becomes a tiger in Pall Mall.

The first thing, therefore, hinted by the Pope of Berkeley Square to his acolyte, was that, of all his Parisian means and appliances, his new set of teeth by Desirabode could alone be retained wtih advantage. He also offered him the address of a decent tailor.

Lord Dinton looked down with an air half-injured, half-interrogative, on the capacious sleeves of his *redingotte à la Videl;* and when Reuben shook his head with a smile of affable condemnation, faltered the name of the London snip who had borne and forborne so laudably, on his account, his *very* long account, some ten years before; at which, Reuben indulged in a laugh as good-humoured as was compatible with his official Cato-ship.

"*That* worthy man died in the Queen's Bench, some ten years ago," said he: "thanks, I am afraid, my dear Dinton, to the extensive patronage of your friends. The squaretoes who has dressed *me* ever since I was at Harrow, is nearer your mark: — a first-rate fellow, who takes measure not only of your inches, but your position in life. *He* would not allow that atrocious brother-in-law of yours to over-dress like a successful railway contractor; for he knows that the cut of a county member is stereotyped like that of a herald's tabard. — *He* realizes his customer, as well as dresses him; and in taking your seat in the Lords, my dear Dinton, you must really abjure the vulgar pomps and vanities of Parisian flash. — I need not remind you how often trifling mistakes in costume or habits, suffice to brand a man for the remainder of his days."

No one knew it better than Lord Dinton; because no one had applied the branding iron more mercilessly, in his days of dandydom, than the Honourable Gerald Molyneux. He had not dreamed *then* that, in living to become an earl, he should also live to become a fogey!

"And where should you advise me to set up my staff, Reuben?" said he, endeavouring to rally his spirits. "The family penitentiary belongs to my mother, who will establish herself there shortly, that I

may have the Castle free, to be remodelled and refitted before next hunting season."

"And even were it yours, I suppose you would what is called submit it to the hammer?" — rejoined his friend. "It costs a man an additional brougham-horse and a life of grace, to reach his club from that end of the town. What say you to Carlton Terrace?"

"Too near that vulgar dog, my brother-in-law."

"Or the Terrace in Piccadilly?"

"For a house *there*, you must book yourself as a country baronet's eldest son is put up at Boodle's, — the day you are born."

"Pardon me, — Fairlawn's house will be in the market before the year is out. — Fairlawn has been burning a whole candelabrum of candles at both ends, and is as decidedly hard up as if his rental were eight hundred a-year instead of eighty thousand."

"Why, what has he been doing?"

"A little too much of every thing: a far more dangerous experiment than cultivating a single vice."

"His house, I admit, would be the very thing for me," said the Earl. "And Fairlawn knows how to live. It would save me a world of trouble to step into his shoes. I suppose his chef will be in the market as well as his *casa?*"

"Probably — he ought. — For I suspect my friend Loncier has been a principal cause of bringing it there."

"Is there any hope, think you, my dear Reuben, that the smash will be immediate?" said Lord Dinton, earnestly. "I should like amazingly to get settled in town before Easter. — I have a daughter to bring out, and a son to bring *in* — to parliament, of course." —

Reuben Howard interrupted him by an irresistible laugh, at the idea of his old friend Gerald in the character of a chaperon and *pater familias*.

"*Que voulez vous!*" said he. "*Tout Valère finit par devenir Géronte.*"

And then he laughed again, at the idea that, from that transition, he was himself as safe as Queen Elisabeth.

"I shall see Fairlawn to-night at my sister Groby's, who has some sort of drum to meet as many royal highnesses as her house and her largest invitation card can hold," added Reuben. "Shall I sound him about his house and household?"

"I should be most obliged to you. I am willing to purchase the plantation, with all the slaves upon the property."

"*That*, I fear, would be impossible. He can only have a life interest in it; for he has got rid of every thing that was tangible; — all but this house and Fairlawn Manor."

"A long lease, then?"

"I will see about it for you," said Reuben, taking out his pocket-book. "What are you prepared to give?"

"From twelve to fifteen hundred a-year, for a first-class house, thoroughly furnished."

"Well, well. — I will throw out a feeler or two without committing you," added the universal commissioner, "and let you know how he seems disposed."

Poor Lord Dinton — already encoiled in the snares of social diplomacy! — In the Brown, Jones, and Robinson, class of the community, a man in want of a house, aware that an old acquaintance possessed one he wanted to get rid of, would naturally have paid him a visit or addressed him by letter, to make further inquiries. But following the fashion of the faithful humble servants, by whose subservience Reuben Howard was erected into an irresponsible minister of state, the new Earl seemed to fancy that the grand mystery of to let and to hire, could only be solved through his interference.

Then came the momentous questions of equipage and horseflesh. — A New Zealander newly caught, could not have appeared more at sea, in these matters, than the once knowing Gerald. — Reuben took pity, however, on the innocence of his second childhood, and condescended to hold his leading strings. — The plain dark brougham, the gorgeous state-chariot, the

light park phaeton, were discussed and determined on; all three of which might, perhaps, have been constructed out of the timber used in the family coach of the Countess Dowager.

"But is Lady Dinton to exercise no choice in these matters?" inquired Reuben, who, though he had held Mrs. Molyneux as cheap as the brocade of an advertising haberdasher, began to entertain some respect for the future proprietress of a cook like Loncier.

"What woman's taste is to be trusted in regard to horses, harness, or carriages?" said the Earl, contemptuously. "Female influence, my dear Reuben, should never be allowed to extend to the stable-yard. Emma will have enough to do in bringing forward her daughter. By the way, you must speak to your sister, the Duchess, about them."

"With the greatest pleasure. I am afraid, however, that some kind of election-feud has arisen between Groby Abbey and Harrals."

"So much the better; you don't suppose I am going to tie round my neck my mill-stone of a brother-in-law? When we were down in the world, he never held out a finger to us. *A mon tour!* — The last person I shall care to welcome to Fairlawn House, (and get it for me, my dear Reuben, you really must), will be Sir John Woolston Wraysbury."

The result of this appeal to the services of the lay diplomat, was that, late in the same evening, old

Reuben was seen leading Lord Fairlawn into a recessed window of one of the most gloomy of the Duchess of Groby's suite of ill-lighted apartments, looking as mysterious as if about to negociate the pacification of Europe; though in reality about to extricate the much be-Jewed nobleman from a predicament as awkward as Jason's before he had managed to chloroform the Colchian dragon.

His mind being set upon enjoying his Easter holidays in Paris, Lord Fairlawn came readily to terms; and almost before Lady Dinton and Lady Theodosia became familiar with their new names, they found themselves settled in one of the most charming residences in London. The younger of the two was still of opinion that the Bay of Naples afforded a pleasanter look-out than a park, which, calling itself Green, is usually brown. — But her lady mother, better up in her Court Guide, was satisfied that few cities in Europe afford a pleasanter locality.

Had the sumptuous reception-rooms contained fewer mirrors, poor Emma would perhaps have found more satisfaction in them. For, alas! a restless mind and uneasy life had ravaged her fine features; and in endeavouring to repair by too much art these natural defections, she doubled the injury. But it did seem a little hard that her beauty should have taken leave of her, previous to the arrival of her fortune.

All she had formerly thought and said concerning

the fruitless elevation of poor Maria, recurred, moreover, to her mind, when she found herself nearly as great a stranger in London as formerly Lady Wraysbury.

The lapse of a season or two suffices to break up a coterie, — by death, — by dispersion, — by the divorce of one, the default of another: — the great quicksand of time swallowing them up unnoticed. But return after half-a-dozen years of absence in a foreign land, and it is far easier to count those who remain, than those who have vanished. The contemporaries whom the vain Emma had looked forward to dazzle and mortify, if Gerald should ever succeed to the Earldom of Dinton, were many of them in a better land; and many estranged from the follies of fashion by higher pursuits and nobler duties.

Still, an engrossing purpose remained to be accomplished. — Theo. must be suitably married; and Edgar honourably established in public life.

To effect this, her spirits must not flag on the threshold of the *beau monde*. Her mourning might be unbecoming; and the impossibility of ball-giving, a disadvantage. — But spirit and enterprise would do much. Her sisters, Caroline and Clara, had inherited the slavish spirit of poor Lady Woolston; but like Sir John, and Sir Harry before him, *she* had projects of her own.

"But, dearest mums, when shall we go out of

town?" pleaded Lady Theodosia, after a week spent in their new mansion, already a little tired of the *avant saison* so tedious in London to those for whom no family connexions create minor engagements. — "I want to see these two cousins, of whom Edgar raves so perseveringly."

"You will see more than enough of them, darling, at the end of the London season." —

"I would rather see them *now*. — At present, every thing seems strange, and every body cold. We know so few people in town, and they are most of them so disagreeable!"

"You used to be fond of the Grandisons."

"But I hoped in London to see new faces. It is a bore to listen to nothing but Monsieur de St. Marcel's and Lord Frederick Hill's Neapolitan reminiscences; — stories that my cradle was rocked with. — As to that old Duchess of Groby —"

"Hush, hush, my dear Theo. Duchesses are never to be called old. And you must be cautious in London in your use of proper names. You know nothing of the English great world, where every body is related to every body."

"I wish Edgar would come up to town, Mamma," replied Lady Theodosia, with a sigh. "There are so many people and things I want him to explain to me: — people and things, I can't help fancying, that have sprung up since you lived in London."

"You must learn to call your brother, Wilchester. Theo. — It sounds better than Edgar."

"It does not, however, come so near my heart. But why does he loiter so in Northamptonshire?"

"Because long absence has alienated him from us. — He was learning to love his uncle better than his father."

"And therefore prefers the society of those by whom he is most regretted. Yes, I understand; and I dare say he is a great comfort to grandmamma and my aunts. — It is very kind and considerate of you, mother, not to force him to leave them."

Her ladyship tacitly accepted her daughter's approval. No need to inform her, that propinquity to the heiress of Lynchcombe was the leading object in her projects for her son.

CHAPTER IX.

THE new Earl, meanwhile, resumed, far more readily than his Countess, the routine of London life: the result, perhaps, of being "to the manner born," or of having completed, in the publicity of clubs, the education commenced in the publicity of Eton.

Men have a considerable advantage over the weaker sex in the formation and renewal of acquaintanceships. After long absence, in Asia, — Africa, — America, — Nineveh, — Constantinople, no matter where, — a man of the world walks into the Carlton, or Brookes's, or White's; and twenty pair of hands are extended towards him, as if he had shaken them the preceding day, with "John, how are you?" — or, at most, "Where have you been, old fellow, for the last hundred years?" —

But among women, all this must be effected by a formal interchange of visiting cards; and when a Lady Anybody has caught a glimpse, in some crowd, of a new Lady Dinton likely to give parties, whom she remembers long years before her own daughters were out, as a Mrs. Molyneux who gave nothing, — she "wonders where she is to be found;" — will try "to recollect to ask Lady Somebody else, who used to be

her intimate friend;" — and finally, not discovering her name in the Court Guide (published before her ladyship's re-establishment in town), gives up the chase as hopeless. — They meet, and look shy at each other; and the season probably passes without their coming to an explanation.

If it be true that no man learns to wear a military uniform under twelve months' experience, it requires full a year to render a woman of fashion thoroughly mistress of a new establishment in town.

"This will never do!" mused Emma, on surveying a Sevres dish full of visiting cards, interspersed with a few of invitation "thinly scattered up to make a show." — And lo! like the rest of her sex, she could think of nothing better than to apply for advice and assistance, in consultation extraordinary, with the Chamber Counsel, — Reuben Howard!

The ineffable Reuben, whose experience of London and its liabilities was so different from her own, and who looked on the Court Guide as a list of pushing people, whose acquaintance was to be avoided, was not a little amused. — But the deference evinced to his authority by the new ladyship, propitiated his scorn; and he condescendingly countersigned her brief.

"You must give a concert," said he. "A ball, so recently after the death of a father and brother, would be indecorous; and *la décence avant tout.* As that

worthy old trot, Dinton's mother, used to say, 'we are bound to show an example.'"

"But surely," argued Emma, the particle of woman in her nature revolting against such a proposal, — "surely even a concert would be thought incompatible with our deep mourning? — Only three months since Lord Dinton's death!"

"Such points are established by precedent; and it has always been accepted as the law of our world, that a concert may be given under any amount of domestic affliction: nay, almost by a widow or widower. Queen Charlotte, a great authority in matters of etiquette, gave concerts, I have heard my mother say, at Buckingham House, at a period when —"

"But that was before the flood, my dear Mr. Howard," interrupted Lady Dinton.

"Well, then, only last year, Lady Harriet Flittering gave two excellent concerts while her mother was at the last gasp, from a cancer; and the Duchess of Brumly has cards out for one, at this moment, though her youngest son is sent condemned to Madeira. In short, a concert is not supposed to compromise any depth of personal grief. And then, as Sir Pottifer Hampson would say, it is the only chance for your case. — People will go *any where* for good music! — Lady Melsingtown, within an inch of Doctors' Commons, filled her house, last season, by means of Grisi and Mario."

Emma was not sorry that her young daughter had not been admitted to this curious conclave; especially when old Howard proceeded to lecture her in a strain that seemed to reduce her to nothingness.

"Leave it all to me," — said he. "*I* will engage the singers, and my sister shall invite the company. By next season, probably, you will be able to invite acquaintances of your own."

Remonstrate she dared not, for it was only by Reuben Howard's assistance she could hope to accomplish her object. — When visited by her brother, soon after her establishment in Piccadilly, she had informed him that, according to the old adage, there are two modes of attaining the apex of the pyramid of fashion: — one to crawl upward like an insect, — the other to pounce down upon it, like an eagle; giving him to understand that her rank in life entitled her to the latter mode, and that he might accept the former if he thought proper. — On perceiving the bitter leaven of his former animosities rising in his temper at the suggestion, she added something about being happy to do any thing in her power for her niece, whenever Miss Wraysbury was to be introduced into the London world.

Perceiving that this tone of patronage was extremely offensive to her brother, against whom, though her animosity had subsided, it had only sunk into the depths of her heart to emerge on the slightest pro-

vocation, she would have felt peculiarly mortified at being convicted of inability to fulfil her undertaking.

Had she known the truth of the case, that Janetta had mildly declined to make her entrance into society while still depressed by the scenes of affliction she had lately witnessed, to punish which resistance, she had been dispatched with the Wroughtons from Harrals to Lynchcombe, — on her father's removal to town, it would have been a great relief to her. To be spared the incumbrance of a rustic niece was *something;* and to learn that even the discipline of a patent governess did not totally extinguish independence of mind, a still greater consolation.

Meanwhile the lists for "the Countess of Dinton's first concert at the family mansion on the Terrace, Piccadilly," were peremptorily made out by Howard; and though it was not expressly forbidden her to change an item of the bill of fare, either as regarded performers or guests, experience convinced her that the slightest interference on her part would swamp the newly-launched vessel.— Even the hint she adventured of a sitting-down supper after the concert, was negatived without a division, by a supercilious smile; which she would not have provoked, a second time, for the whole amount to be squandered on the twelve first-rate Italian performers announced in her programme.

Her policy, meanwhile, or rather Reuben's, was more than successful. For though certain wives of

certain squires and baronets of the mid-land counties, to whom the virtues and merits of the two last Earls of Dinton were objects of veneration, shook their heads with disgust and indignation at the announcement in the Morning Post of the festivities meditated by their representative, they belonged precisely to the class which the former Miss Woolston of Harrals intended, in her Countesshood, to ignore. — She was already tasting, moreover, the enjoyment so dear to would-be fine ladies, of refusing invitations anxiously applied for through some mutual friend. "She regretted to say that, her house being so small and her acquaintance so large, she had been already compelled to close her list." Two falsehoods in a breath! — But as they had been suggested to her by the Duchess of Groby, and enter into the category of conventional excuses, such as "not at home," and "previously engaged," she did not think it necessary to assume a hair garment in expiation of her duplicity.

But the astonishment of Theodosia at finding that the Grandisons, — her old, old friends, — could not possibly be invited, was greater than even Howard's at the idea of white soup and truffled poulardes in succession to "Le chemin du Paradis!" — The poor girl could not and would not believe it. — She appealed to her father, and was patted kindly on the shoulder, as "a little goose who was still in her accidence in the language of London." She appealed to her mother;

and was informed that Mr. Howard had refused an invitation to his own niece, a Lady Something Somebody, living in Queen Anne Street, because she was in a bad set, and might expect Lady Dinton to patronize, in return, one of her vulgar balls.

"But it is not Mr. Howard's house or concert, dear Mamma?"

"It is *more* than his, my dear Theo., since he has so kindly undertaken the bore of the whole affair."

"But he would not, unless he liked it. Some people are fond of that sort of intermeddling. This Mr. Howard seems to be what Berty Grandison calls a *tant à faire.*"

"Hush, my dear child! For mercy's sake, don't let Mr. Howard suppose you called him *this* Mr. Howard! — You are not yet able, Theo., to form an estimate of the importance of being *prôné* by such a man. It is only under *very* peculiar circumstances that an authority, like Reuben Howard, condescends to take people up."

Lady Theodosia could scarcely believe that she heard her mother rightly: — her mother, whom she had sometimes ventured to think a little haughty. Poor girl, — she was indeed still in her accidence! — She had still to learn how vilely people will compromise their dignity to accomplish what they consider a step in life; or, amid the paltry struggles of London life —

How mean, how abject are the proud,
How little are the great!

For the first time, she began to applaud the contumacy of her brother Edgar, — no, — Wilchester, — she was learning to call him Wilchester, — in absenting himself from town. — Far better live among people who did not cast off their old friends like fretted garments; or regard the reminiscences of early affection as a tale that is told.

But Edgar, Lord Wilchester, like most other lords, was not destined to remain long his own master. Young as he was, his late uncle had confided so largely in his discretion, that at the time of investing twenty thousand pounds in the names of Roger Farmer and Hugh Pennington, for his benefit, immediately after the death of the old Earl, he also made him master of the deed of gift which transferred Havermead to poor Bessy. — And as she had determined to repair thither at once, in order to enable her brother to bring home his promised bride, it was necessary that her title of ownership should be made perfectly clear.

The first impulse of the broken-spirited Miss Pennington had been to restore the property to the family: for time and place were, alas! nothing to her now. — But the Dowager-Countess, who still delighted to call her by the tender name of daughter, and her friends Mary and Jemima, opposed their utmost influence to the sacrifice. — They had themselves removed from

the Castle to old Lady Dinton's dower-house in town; "and where are we ever to meet again, dear Bessy," pleaded her self-styled sisters-in-law, "unless you retain Havermead, where we should often become your inmates? — You would wrong yourself, you would wrong the memory so dear to us, if you were to give up his favourite home to Gerald, who has no need of an accession of property, and has always detested the place." —

This last argument secured poor Bessy's acquiescence. — She could not bear the thought that her dear Dinton's favourite Manor-House, of which he had talked to her again and again, till every view from its windows and every shrub on its lawn was pictured in her mind, should be thrown into the hands of improvers, as would probably be the case with the Castle. Bessy had witnessed the demolition of old Harrals. She could not bear that the same effacement should occur at that beloved Havermead, where they had hoped to be so transcendantly happy.

The genial month of May tending to facilitate the fifty miles transit of the poor old squire, over which his son was to preside, Edgar, who had already undertaken every other arrangement, now hastened to escort her on her trying journey.

Poor Bessy! — Pale, — speechless, — heart-broken! — One half her heart absorbed in the scarcely living form in whose invalid-carriage she was estab-

lished, like an attendant spirit of love and grace; — the other half, buried in the grave! —

Her thanks to Lord Wilchester, a day or two after her installation in her new home, were not expressed in words. There was too much felt to be spoken. — But she pressed his hand fervently, and blessed him as though he were a son of her own. For she saw how fully he sympathized in her intolerable misery; and her grateful prayers followed him in the spirit as he pursued his reluctant journey to town.

CHAPTER X.

Though not easily cast down, the new Earl of Dinton felt a little awkward at his first visit to the family mansion of his mother and sisters; which, though *his* was already a house of feasting, remained, in truth as in seeming, a house of mourning.

During his short visit to the Castle, immediately on his arrival in England, the discrepancy between the feelings of his family and his own, if less apparent, had passed unobserved. — The thoughts of the mourners were then too completely absorbed by the affliction of poor Bessy and the scarcely closed grave of him she loved, to take much heed of what was passing around them. But now that three months had elapsed, his sisters, if not his mother, could not but note the false juvenility of Gerald's appearance, and unconcealable elation of his spirits. — Their brother was many years their senior. But though the sorrows of the last twelvemonth seemed to have doubled *their* age, there was no reason why the new Earl should assume to be, in dress, manners, and conversation, so very much younger than his son.

The interview was as brief as decency would allow. — Lord Dinton, though, as a matter of politeness,

rather than of feeling, he avoided all allusion to family topics, when he found them grieving openly with and for poor Bessy, as if for a sister of their own, was provoked into such ungracious expressions concerning what he called the unpardonable alienation of Havermead from the family, that, short as was his visit, even his mother wished that it had been curtailed.

It shocked the poor old lady, beyond expression, to find that the new Earl and Countess of Dinton were affording so bad an example to society, as to have opened their house for feasting and merriment, while her own was still beset with formal messages of condolence.

But though to *her* the visit was so unsatisfactory, his lordship had managed to extract from it a great deal that he wanted to ascertain. — Though for so many years past old Molyneux had been a *ci-devant jeune homme*, his heart had been, perhaps, a little rejuvenized by the new teeth which Reuben Howard had not condemned him to *cut*, as well as his Parisian habits. His son's attachment to Northamptonshire seemed suddenly to excite his curiosity.

"I trust," said he, more respectfully to the dowager, "that your grandson proved useful to you, in your preparations for removal to town?"

"I have no doubt he was," replied old Lady Dinton, glancing towards her daughters; who, now that

she had lost the son whose mind was her mind, and whose voice her voice, usually acted as her mouthpiece. — "But, I have seen little of him. In my state of severe family affliction, Gerald, I have been able to see nobody."

"Still, Edgar, as your inmate." —

"I can scarcely call him an inmate. He was more at Denny Cross than at the Castle."

"And more at Harrals, probably, than either. At *his* time of life, younger relationships are apt to excite the stronger interest."

"Yes, — he is, indeed, deeply attached to poor Bessy," answered the dowager, like her deceased son, as hard of hearing as she was soft of heart. "And so he ought, for she really loves him like a son."

Lord Dinton, fancying that his mother was cleverly evading the question, now addressed his sisters. To them, he did not hesitate to observe that he concluded the greater portion of Lord Wilchester's leisure was spent at Harrals.

"Quite a mistake," replied Lady Jemima. "I don't think Edgar has been there for the last two months."

"Two *months?*" reiterated Lord Dinton in dismay.

"Edgar is scarcely so kind to his cousin as he ought to be. His cousin is no favourite."

"To *us* he always speaks of her with the greatest regard?"

"Of HER? — You are talking of Miss Wraysbury, then?" —

"Of course. I observed that he probably spent much of his time at Harrals —"

"Which made me suppose that you alluded to another cousin, — Olave Harpsden."

"Olave Harpsden!" muttered his lordship, with a gesture of impatience. "They are scarcely acquainted."

"At the time of my poor brother's death, Edgar saw something of him; and thought it his duty to invite him to attend the funeral. As to Harrals Hall, it is once more a desart, — shut up, — deserted. — Even at Easter, Sir John did not come down for a single day. — It would not surprise me if he never resided there again. The obloquy he incurred by his share in poor dear Willy's death will be too much for him."

"I remember hearing some idle tale about poachers and gaol-fever, in which Edgar's name was stupidly mixed up," said the Earl, with an air of nonchalance; "but I never was at the trouble to get to the bottom of the story. It would disgust me too much to find a son of mine — my only son — defiling himself by stepping into the puddle of radical politics."

Perceiving no immediate connexion between radical politics and the unpopularity of Sir John Wraysbury, Lady Jemima returned to her lost brother.

"It is too much the custom to call the people ungrateful," said she. — "And the respect they have shown to poor Willy's memory will, I trust, afford a lesson to Sir John; if, indeed, he can abstract his mind one moment from the worship of the Golden Calf. Instead of forgetting poor dear Dinton, they seem to cherish the remembrance of him more and more throughout the district; the good seed sown in his lifetime, daily rising to bear witness for him."

"I can well understand that Sir John may consider schools and almshouses a less advantageous investment for his money than railways and canals," replied Gerald, with a sneer. "But, after all, he is a low vulgar dog. — When I talked to him the other day about re-establishing the Hurdiston hounds, and proposed his giving something towards it — a thousand a-year or so — he shuffled out of it by saying that till Harry was of age, he did not intend to reside on his Northamptonshire property."

"And *that* will not be for the next five or six years," observed Lady Jemima. — "How completely the events of the last few months have changed his plans. I believe, however, that his preference of Dorsetshire is not wonderful. Edgar, who has been at Blandhurst lately, on a visit to one of the Grandisons, declares that Lynchcombe is the most beautiful spot on earth. In his flighty style, he calls it Aladdin's palace transported into the garden of Eden."

Though affecting to be disgusted at Lord Wilchester's flippancy, his father took a hasty leave: — having obtained all the information he desired. Though not in Northamptonshire, Edgar *had* been dangling after his cousin. — The manœuvring of Sir John to keep them apart, had been infructuous.

He now began almost to regret having sanctioned Lady Dinton's incivility to their old friends the Grandisons: Blandhurst was by no means a bad turnpike gate on the road to Aladdin's palace.

At present, however, the heiress was nearer to him than he suspected; and the garden of Eden, as deserted as the hall of Harrals. Though Sir John had absented himself from Northamptonshire, at Easter, he had hurried down to his grander domain; — and in the course of his journey, albeit unused to the philosophic mood, meditated largely on the truth of the adage which, when young, strikes us as so futile, and when old as so grievously true — that "the events we have most desired occur only under circumstances that deprive them of half their charm."

In his own case — his great stroke of fortune had befallen him when his wife was too ill to bear the disclosure; and now, the *début* in life of the heiress of Lynchcombe was marred by her depression of spirit. But even in strict confidence to himself, he said nothing of the mortification attending his own entrance into parliament; the friendships and support bespoken for

him by the late Lord Dinton, having dropped with him into the grave.

The prophetic hints of Roger Farmer occurred, too, to his memory: that "the day would come when his own children would avenge upon him his rebellion against parental authority." The conduct of Janetta at the time of Lord Dinton's seizure and death, filled him with alarm for the future. Already, she seemed to be asserting a will of her own!

"But I must at once put an end to it!" — mused he. "The whole family must return with me to town. Their interests and mine require it. I am not going to have my projects frustrated by the wilfulness of a froward child, or the abject, yea-nay want of energy of my sister."

But he had little opposition now to fear. And disdaining, like most arbitrary egotists, the domestic contests in which it depended only on himself to become the victor, — (for even an Amurath begins to pall in blood-spill when endowed with unlimited command of the bow-string and scymitar,) — he was rejoiced to find the three ladies as fully prepared to be compelled to a residence in town, as the most *nolo-episcoparian* dean to ensconce a mitre.

The tears of seventeen or eighteen are not fated to flow for ever; and Netta, on finding that by translation to Dorsetshire, she had utterly lost sight of Denny Cross and Harrals, was eager to be once more within

reach of the Farmers, and those kind spinsters of the Molyneux family, who had adopted her as their own. — On her road to town, Sir John W. W. took care, of course, to recapitulate to the heiress, his own version of the proverbial philosophy which had embittered his journey down; assuring her, that half the charm of London would be lost to her by arriving so late; — that people had formed their plans for the approaching campaign; and that even her aunt Emma, and cousin Theodosia, would *now* have little leisure to bestow on her.

But the strong heart of Netta was not to be frightened with shadows. — She knew that in Eaton Square three loving hearts were waiting to welcome her; and that in the gloomy old mansion of the dowager, her looks would be as sunshine. — It did grieve her, however, to perceive that her father had resumed towards her almost the forbidding tone of earlier years. — In recovering his health and strength, Sir John had evidently recovered something of his former harshness.

But to maintain towards Netta any sustained severity, would have been, indeed, difficult. Her form was so slight, her features were so delicate, her voice and countenance so feminine, that the most savage nature was softened in her presence. The tears trembled so readily in her hazel eyes, that to provoke

them would have been a crime as cowardly as Zeluco's, in crushing the favourite bird of his wife.

In Hilda Wroughton's exaltation of character, there was something that seemed to defy reproof. But compared with her lofty cousin, Netta was as the lily of the valley beside the towering garden lily; at once far easier to trample upon, and far sweeter to the sense. — Easier to trample upon? — The wealthiest heiress in the kingdom? — Alas! what defence is afforded to a woman's tender heart by seventy thousand a-year in prospect, or possession? — Could her feelings, as well as her shares and securities, be secured in one of the safes of Chubb? — Was her happiness, as well as the interests of her funded property, payable in half-yearly instalments? —

"Pretty Netta! — Darling sister!" whispered Constance to her aunt-mother, (as they sat reading together, according to the pleasant manner of the delicate little girl's daily studies,) after Miss Wraysbury's first visit to Eaton Square. "Do you think she looks quite so bright and happy as she used before my aunt and cousin came to live with her?"

"She ought to be happy. She has every thing to make her happy."

"But *is* she? — No human being, you sometimes tell me, is *quite* what they ought to be."

"You forget, my child, that we have all been suffering from a severe dispensation."

"Yes — but Uncle Dinton was not to my sister what he was to Aunt Bessy, or cousin Edgar, or even to you and uncle Farmer."

"She felt for our grief, Constance." — Mrs. Farmer was too high principled a woman to add — "and was humiliated by the blame incurred by her father." That part of the question was easily evaded by inquiring of her dear little pupil, what made her fancy Janetta out of spirits?

"Only that she kissed me oftener, and was much more silent than I ever saw her before. — She looked like a butterfly with its wings folded. — So different from the same creature fluttering in the air — though still so beautiful."

"Still so beautiful!" repeated Mrs. Farmer, with tears in her eyes. "Still full of kindly thoughts and feelings, thinking of every one's happiness before her own. Such is your sister; and such, too, dear Constance, was the mother you never saw; now an angel in Heaven, as she was on earth."

To talk of that mother, the object of aunt Sophy's still yearning affection, though ten years in the grave, the mind of the little girl was insensibly led away from the graver aspect of poor Janetta which had excited Mrs. Farmer's anxiety no less than her own.

CHAPTER XI.

When children come home for the holidays, their hearts set upon home comforts, with pantomimes, story-books, and sugar-plums *ad libitum*, they are generally roused from their dream of happiness to visit the dentist and submit to the clipping of the hairdresser, the tyranny and torture of tailors, stay-makers, or shoe-makers: to undergo the *visa* of the family apothecary, and the lectures of the rich maiden aunt who puts dry bread into their custard.

So is it with children of a larger growth. — Poor Edgar arrived in town, (his grief having subsided into the depths of his heart to remain as a sacred deposit for evermore); hoping to enjoy the comforts of family affection, both in the first and second degree. — But the grand mansion in Piccadilly was far less of a home to him than he had found at the Castle. — His first exhortation from his mother, was not to introduce any of his college friends, or country connexions, into her house, without her especial sanction; as she was forming her acquaintance with scrupulous care, and did not choose to have strange faces seen at her parties. — As to his father, *his* injunctions, if not equally frivolous, were still more vexatious.

The morning after his arrival, before he had even time to pay a visit of dutiful affection in Bruton Street, or of any other sort of affection to any other member of the family, he was summoned to Lord Dinton's own room; a miniature library opening into the private garden, which the auspicious blooming time of lilacs, laburnums, and pink thorns, in the adjoining enclosure, rescued just then from its habitual dinginess.

Yet the man so long acclimatized in Italy, complained fretfully of the sunless dreariness of the place; and though the warmth and brilliancy of June were around him, sat close to a crackling fire, which he affected to rate among the few luxuries of London. Even in his wadded silk dressing-gown, he seemed to shiver.

But Edgar soon began to think his moral chilliness far more to be deplored.

"I lose no time, my dear Wilchester," said he, "in coming to an understanding with you on two or three points, in which it is indispensable that a father and son should, — that we in short should — understand each other. — You understand? — In former days, fathers and sons used to fight in different camps — often for want of a mutual understanding. And vulgar squabbles ensued, — and all that sort of thing, which I need not tell you is the worst possible style. — But we have changed all that, as Shakespeare says, or

Molière, or somebody or other; and fathers and sons begin to live together as gentlemen ought."

"I trust, my dear father, we shall always live *happily* together," said Edgar, already graver than when he entered that pleasant room. — "It was thus I always lived with my uncle."

"Yes, — and to my great satisfaction, — my *sincere* satisfaction. — Still, in living on such perfect sympathy with one who, though eminently good and respectable, was not, — you understand, — exactly a man of the world, you may have contracted views — you *have* indeed contracted views, likely to be injurious to your — your — advancement in life."

"I want no advancement in life, dear father, — I am quite satisfied with my position."

"*There!* — Thank you! — You have answered *for* me. — You have supplied me with the argument I wanted. — That is just one of poor Willy's narrow-minded assertions. You *do* want advancement in life, my dear fellow. Every body wants advancement in life; — men, women, and nations. — Else, why do kings go to war, or dukes accept working appointments under government?"

"But I am neither a king nor a duke," replied Edgar, beginning, as no other auditor was present, to be a little amused.

"You are a fractional part of them," argued his father. "My views in such matters are purely practi-

cal, — you understand? — I hold that so many dukes make a king, — so many earls a duke, — and so forth. There ought to be an avoirdupois table for men and women, Edgar, as well as for groceries and drugs. — But that is not now the question. What I want to impress upon you, my dear boy, is, that I shall seize the first opening to start you in public life."

"But why seize it, father? — I am only just of age. — I have only just become responsible to my tailor. — Why make me responsible to the country?" —

"Because in our class, — in our order, I should perhaps say, — men are born responsible to the country. — And the sooner you learn to discharge the obligation, the better."

"My poor uncle did not think so; or he would not have put forward Sir John Wraysbury for the county."

"He might not think you square-toed enough for a county member; — not sufficiently *carré sur la base.* — But I promise you he intended to place you in the Lower School of Parliament as soon as might be: — to represent Hurdiston, if possible, — if not, some easy borough — no matter where." —

Lord Wilchester looked uneasy. — Perhaps because the veracity of the author of his days appeared a little questionable.

"In my time," added his father more firmly, — "the eldest son of a peer who was not in Parliament, was a dead-letter."

"You often speak of your time, my dear father, as if it were out of the memory of man," pleaded Edgar.— "To what period do you exactly allude?"

Lord Dinton, — or rather old Molyneux, — hated to be nailed to an Anno Domini.

"Why, I consider my time to have been," he replied peevishly, "that is — I understand by the words *my* time, — a — a — I understand — Why, the time of the old club at Melton."

Though tolerably well up in his Chepmell, and Mangnall, and other assistants to the memory of ingenuous youth, — Edgar was puzzled. — Such a date was decidedly not recorded in their pages.

"My poor uncle, two years your senior, always appeared to me so young a man," — he was beginning: but Lord Dinton cut him short.

"Yes, as you say, Willy was amazingly young. In many respects, boyish, — almost childish; — the juvenility of a golden pippin preserved for fifty years in wax. — But the question before the House, Wilchester, — you understand? — is not *our* age, but *yours*. — You are, as I stated just now, on the eve of coming into Parliament. — Your name is up at the three best clubs. And though, for both our sakes, I don't want to find you perpetually hooked to my arm, you will soon be known by sight to every one worth knowing, as my eldest son. — A national institution worth something, that law of primogeniture!" —

The young Viscount, who, in his youth, had heard the Honourable Gerald discuss the question with very different arguments, held his peace. It was less easy to keep his countenance.

"Our guilds and primogeniture," said the Earl, draping his wadded dressing-gown around him in toga-like folds, like Cæsar preparing to fall with decency, "are nearly our only reliques of feudal times, — our sole inheritance from the days of chivalry. In short," added the fireside orator, "it will no longer do for you to be seen in company with persons of questionable respectability."

"My dear father" —

"Have the goodness to hear me out." — (He could not conscientiously add in "my time, young men listened to their parents without interruption.") — "You and I probably differ about the meaning of the word respectability. To prevent any possible error on your part, therefore, I explicitly warn you that I do not wish you to be seen in company with that Mr. Farmer."

"Roger Farmer?" reiterated Lord Wilchester, unspeakably astonished; for he had supposed his father to allude to one or two of his less reputable Christchurch chums.

"The man who married one of the Penningtons, and lives in Eaton Square."

"But he is one of my late uncle's executors! —

He was one of his most valued friends! — He is one of the first men in England!"

Lord Dinton slightly curled his lip, and gently raised his shoulders; as though his son's ignorance of the world deserved only an indulgent measure of contempt.

"You are not at present capable of distinguishing very accurately in such matters," said he. — "Your Mr. Farmer is perhaps a great man in his way. But his way is not ours. He is a professed Reformer, I find, — the new name for Radical."

"He is a Liberal, — if that is what you mean," cried Edgar, impatiently. "But my uncle, who was a professed Conservative, regarded him with the utmost respect."

"I don't pretend to understand the political nomenclature of the day," rejoined his father, drawing nearer the fire. "In my time, we had Whigs and Tories; and, as when children played at French and English, the game implied a pitched battle. — Now, we have as many political sects as religions, — though still but one sauce. While adhering to their melted butter, people talk of a liberal Conservative, as they used about an Antinomian or an Erastian! — *Poor* people!"

"*Very* poor, if they talk of a man like Roger Farmer otherwise than in terms of deference," said Edgar, firmly.

"Your future associates in life are not likely to talk of him at all, having probably never heard his name. And since we have, by the death of my poor brother, escaped the disgrace of a family connexion with a democratic lawyer, there is no need for my being subjected to the annoyance of being asked by a man like Reuben Howard, how a son of mine could have become acquainted with an individual so obnoxious; — one of the founders of the Westminster Review, it seems, — a Benthamite — a —"

"A man of the most distinguished intellect and highest principles!" cried Lord Wilchester, becoming really irritated. — "But not to degrade him, father, by placing a character so noble at the mercy of my poor powers of defence, suffice it, that the intimacy between us *must* be kept up. — Farmer is my trustee as well as friend. — A deed of gift was made me by my uncle —"

"Yes, yes! — I am quite aware that poor Dinton was induced to make you independent of me."

"Independent of *him*, rather. At that time, who could surmise that his days were numbered?"

"At all events, you are indebted to his injudicious kindness for a thousand a-year, — not enough to afford you a maintenance, though sufficient to make you fancy yourself your own master."

"Scarcely *that*, so long as I have parents living," rejoined Edgar, with deep feeling. "To satisfy you

of which, my dear father, I am quite ready to cancel the settlement in question, though not to give up the acquaintance of Roger Farmer."

"I don't ask you to give it up. — I ask you only not to parade it before the world. A man need not place his medicine chest on his library table," added the old beau, with a smile, as he glanced at the bronze and Majolica fopperies displayed upon his own.

"As to your income, Edgar, so far from wishing to deprive you of it, I beg that, should it prove insufficient for your wants, you will consider my bankers your own. — They have received instructions to that effect, and I will order a cheque-book to be sent to you. — No, no thanks, and no disclaimers. — You are not at present aware what calls may be made upon your purse. — But to return to the chapter of prohibitions, — in order that once read to an end, it may be closed for ever: the only other man to whom I object as your companion, is Sir John Wraysbury."

"My mother's brother? — The man my uncle brought into parliament?"

"The more reason to be on our guard against undue intimacy. For the unpopularity of so near a connexion, one might be made responsible. — Your uncle's toleration of him probably arose from the Pennington intermarriage, or perhaps from foreseeing another alliance, — you understand."

"Indeed I do not," said Edgar, as his father paused for a reply.

"Your own, with the heiress of Lynchcombe."

"My uncle foresaw nothing of the kind, my dear father, for nothing of the kind was or is contemplated," said Edgar, eagerly. But on perceiving his father's smile of incredulity, and recalling to mind that too much frankness is as bad as too little, and that in opening his whole heart he was playing gold against counters, he merely added, "it was, on the contrary, my uncle's anxious advice that I should not dream of marrying before my twenty-fifth year was accomplished."

"Because, as you just now observed, he did not contemplate the family changes operated by his sudden death. — However, to bring the question to the finest point, if it were *not* for Netta and Lynchcombe, I should send Sir John Wraysbury to Coventry, and forbid you to enter his house. — No matter his pedigree, — no matter his county standing, the man is a snob, — a *parvenu* in mind and body, if not in estate, intensely *parvenu* — *parvenu* from head to foot! — As Reuben Howard was saying last night, when he passes one in that over-varnished brougham with his high-stepper, on his way down to the House, there seems a smell of bank-notes in the air. — One sees in him so completely a Plenipo-extraordinary from the kingdom of Mammon!"

The secret repugnance experienced by young Wilchester to Sir John W. W. was founded on such far deeper grounds, that he contented himself with replying — "With the foibles of one's own family, one is bound to deal leniently. If not *your* nearest male relative, father, he is my mother's. — Theo. and Janetta are nearly of an age; and companionship between the home-bred girl and foreign-bred girl, might be to their mutual advantage."

"Even though they are never to be sisters-in-law?" added the Earl, rising from his seat, as if to signify that the audience was ended. "But what about the Wroughtons, Edgar? — They must be a sad incumbrance in the house?"

"Not at present," replied Lord Wilchester, who was now preparing to leave the room. "Mrs. Wroughton will not appear till she has laid aside her weeds."

"And the girl?"

"Will be, for some time to come, occupied with masters."

"More masters? — Is the Grandisons' story true, then, (picked up by Berty at Frankfort,) that there was some idea of her going out as governess?"

"Ideas are unsubstantial things. But I never heard so."

"At all events, now that Wraysbury has taken them up, such a humiliation is out of the question. But even myself, though far from a millionary like

Sir John W. W., I should not have allowed it. Not on account of the Wroughtons, — for whom I care not a rush, — but for *your* sake, and Theo.'s — Few people are aware that we are hampered by such a relationship. — But it *might* transpire. — Going to my mother's? — Tell her, then, with my best regards, that I am looking out for a match for her bay horse, as she — (or the old coachman,) — requested."

CHAPTER XII.

"Three children sliding on the ice,
All on a summer's day!"

YES! — those three cousins, — Hilda, Netta, and Theodosia, — almost served to realize into gloomy truth the fantastic chimera of Shakespeare. For, lovely as they were in disposition, form, and features, what were they but children; and was not their path of life, alas! traced out on ground as unsubstantial as if created by a midsummer frost?

The grave, — the mild, — the wild, — was charmingly embodied in the trio. — But as the incomparable Dr. Primrose observed of his daughters, that they sometimes changed characters for a day; and that a new set of ribbons occasionally converted his prude into a coquette; certain it was, that the society of Miss Wroughton imparted strange gravity to the girlish features of Janetta. — As to Lady Theodosia, she was a creature of impulse, whose Monday humour seldom lasted till Tuesday. If she began the week as gay as a bird, she was pretty sure to end it in a fit of the dolefuls.

To her cousin Hilda, she did not take kindly. Miss Wroughton, either from a tinge of Woolston pride, or the experience of personal humiliation, made

not a step forward towards acquaintance. But with Netta, she sympathized in a moment; for towards high and low, old or young, the natural graciousness of the heiress of Lynchcombe, prompted courtesy and kindness. The idea of a repulse never occurred to *her*. Her father and Miss Avesford were the only persons of whom she had ever stood in awe. The rest of her fellow-creatures were all friends, — past, present, or to come.

It gave her some pain, at first, to hear the person she had been accustomed to name to Sir John and Edgar as Aunt Emma, saluted by that familiar name of "Lady Dinton," which she had so often sportively bestowed on her beloved Bessy. Still more so, when the honoured title of Lord Dinton was applied to the made-up old beau, whose pompous homage to herself was almost too much for her gravity. — But the ear soon gets accustomed to such changes. — He who was no longer Lord Dinton, was an angel. — She who had been fated never to become a Countess, was a saint. — The pleasure-loving couple before her, who seemed to affection her almost more than their own children, were, perhaps, better qualified to parade the gauds of hereditary nobility in the factitious sunshine of fashionable life.

Both were equally charmed by the grace and artlessness of their heiress niece. — Her fair complexion and soft hazel eyes afforded so strong a contrast to

the sharp-cut features and swarthy complexions of Southern Italy, which they had been contemplating for so many a year past, that they could not say enough in her praise.

"So different from that forbidding Hilda, who is just like the Evil Spirit in one of La Motte Fouqué's stories," exclaimed Lady Theodosia, after the first visit of her cousins to Piccadilly. "Mamma, we must marry Edgar to Janetta. — We all like her; and what an addition to our family circle!"

It was because her ladyship thought so too, that she replied with an air of the most graceful nonchalance, — "So would Hilda, my dear Theo., or either of the Grandisons. But I trust Wilchester is too wise to mar his prospects in life, by a premature marriage."

For if ever any one subscribed cordially to the opinion professed by Talleyrand that the use of language is to conceal our thoughts, it was the new and revised edition of Emma Woolston. Though the niece whom she had, fourteen years before, jestingly bespoken for her son, and whom, even while concluding her to be a mere rustic pumiced down with a few superficial accomplishments by the polytechnical Avesford, she regarded as her future daughter-in-law, proved to be one of the prettiest and most ingratiating little creatures in the world, she was not to be betrayed into expressing her real opinion.

"You must not throw off your black crape so soon as we intended, Theo.," was all she said, in further explanation. — "You and Netta will look charming, arm-in-arm, as Bianca e Nera."

"Yet Berty Grandison assured us, as we were coming down the steps of the Water-Colour Exhibition yesterday, that we looked like two squares of his ivory and ebony chess-board. — It is true his brother added that we were far more like the two queens destined to stand upon them."

"What signifies the flippancies of either of the Grandisons!" cried Lady Dinton. — "Mere dancing young men about town, fit only for partners. Such people, like the night-blowing flowers, ought to shut up their leaves in the day-time, for they are only in the way."

"The Grandisons are old neighbours of Netta's."

"*Raison de plus.* That is just what I meant by their being in the way. Such danglers may be very injurious to the cause of — of — of your cousin."

The name of Edgar had very nearly escaped her lips.

"Was not Netta sorry to have arrived in town too late for our concert?" she inquired, hoping to divert her daughter's attention.

"*Very* sorry."

"But you gave her, of course, all the details?"

"I gave her a programme. There were several left."

"As if the music were the part of the entertainment likely to interest her!"

"Indeed it was. Netta is passionately fond of music, Mamma. And, would you believe it? she has never heard a note of Verdi or Gounod. I suspect the musical taste instilled into her is very severe; — Mendelssohn, and that sort of thing. — I heard her asking Berty Grandison about some Ancient Concerts."

"Well?" —

"He told her they had been done away with long ago, in the same year with condemned sermons and watchmen's rattles."

"Your cousin had probably heard of them from my sister Clara. When *we* came out, the Ancient Music was the recreation allotted to the wives and daughters of bishops and country baronets: — which rendered one night in our week about as gay as '*le dernier jour d'un condamné*.' — But it is as well that Netta did not come up for my concert. I should have felt a delicacy about asking the Duchess of Groby for another ticket for a stranger."

"A stranger, dear Mamma? — Why, the Duchess is to present my cousin, — to chaperon her, — to take her everywhere. Lady Marington offered her services: — that rude woman, who, when she and her three daughters put up their glasses at one, at a party, produces the effect of a cucumber-frame."

"That flippant remark, Theo., is taken, I am certain, from Berty Grandison."

"I am afraid it is, dear mums. But Berty says such thousands of droll things, that he can well afford to be robbed."

"And to which of these great ladies does the heiress condescend to give the preference?" inquired Lady Dinton, not a little piqued.

"Netta? — To neither. — She hopes to go out sometimes with *us;* but would prefer, I think, staying at home altogether. And I own I could not conscientiously advise her to the contrary. It is much less pleasant than I expected, to plunge into this rolling sea of London life; — where the rooms are so small and crowded, and where people take such pleasure in annoying and thwarting each other. Many are as ungracious to *us*, as *we* have been to the Grandisons."

"Surely not *many*, darling. — You have not much to complain of; and we have invitations for every night for three weeks to come. — As to Netta, prepare, before half that time has elapsed, to see all London at her feet."

"I hope not, mother; for there would be less room for Edgar. — But hush! here he comes; and whenever I begin to talk to him of Carlton Gardens and my cousin, he answers, in the most provoking manner,

by calling her Miss Kilmansegg, and quoting some odious poem about

> 'Gold, gold, gold without end,
> She has gold to lay by, and gold to spend,
> And reversions of gold in future;
> In wealth the family revell'd and roll'd,
> And the heiress sings to her harp of gold,
> O bella età del' oro.'"

Lord Wilchester was in the room almost before the stanza was concluded. But Emma, Lady Dinton, knew better than to pursue the subject in his presence.

It was one, however, that engrossed more minds in the family than her Ladyship's. — Now that Sir John had seen his pretty Netta flung like a flower under the trampling feet of the mobs of fashionable life, an object of curiosity to all, and of interest to many, he was beginning to experience that parental stir of feeling which unites solicitude with tenderness. — Hitherto, his paternal vocation had produced unmingled satisfaction. Miranda, in her island, had not been reared in safer or happier seclusion than the heiress of Lynchcombe. — But now, he saw that she had outgrown the influence of the rod of Prospero; and felt the necessity of supplying a succedaneum.

It was clear that she must marry. In such a position as hers, some one would insist upon marrying her, with or without his consent; and almost, perhaps, without her own. — His first object, therefore, must be to place her in the way of such an alliance as

would secure her happiness, without depriving her of his protection. To himself, he called it protection. His real desire was, instead of affording her means for an independent establishment suitable to her prospects, to hold till the last moment of his life a rod of coercion over the head of one, whom, do what he would, he could not prevent from filling the place to be vacated by his death.

To do him justice, however, he was not altogether devoid of parental yearnings, even as regarded her establishment in life. *That* would have been impossible; even were the daughter to be married less dutiful and less loveable than Netta. He therefore catechized his conscience concerning such predilections as he had ever suspected on the part of his daughter; and the answer to every fresh inquiry, was — "Edgar." —

Had Edgar remained solely Edgar, he might possibly have turned a deaf ear to the suggestion; for a Mr. Molyneux would have been no match for his daughter. Not because his income was limited to a thousand a-year, — for money was not, in this case, the one thing needful; but because, as the daughter-in-law of thriftless, necessitous parents, like Gerald and his wife, her course in life would have been tarnished.

But the heir to the Earldom of Dinton, and forty thousand a-year, occupied a very different footing; and Sir John began to regret the cold shoulder he had

hitherto turned towards his nephew, and the repulsive attitude he had assumed towards the family.

That Edgar was attached to his pretty cousin, he nothing doubted; nor that, from the first, in spite of his professions to the contrary, he had resolved to make her his wife. His embarrassment consisted in knowing how to turn round, without compromise of his own dignity; and extend a hand of welcome where heretofore he had almost exhibited a threatening foot.

His own tact, or judgment, was not suggestive; but he, too, like old Molyneux, had his Pope, though not selected among the grey-beard conscript fathers of May Fair. For fourteen years of Mammonhood had failed to supply to the close-fisted, close-hearted millionary, a single new friend or adviser; and now, as of old, his oracle was the superannuated Q. C.

But to present himself before *him* as a bosom friend and near connexion, required some audacity. For in forming his state-dinner parties, of Grobys, Maringtons, and Dintons, the Farmers had been as scrupulously omitted as though their names were Bothamley; and Sir J. W. W. had not the perspicacity to determine whether the excuses he had subsequently received from them, when invited among the *dii minores*, were the result of pique, or genuine expressions of regret at being forced to decline. Conscious that his strength was declining, Farmer was wise enough to economize the waning flame, by maintaining early hours and

habits of abstemiousness. And then, the fireside of his private life was so happy!

To obtain his opinion appeared, however, so essential, that, as when in need of his advice in the cause of Rothley *versus* Barnstable, Sir John determined to put a good face on his transgressions; and made his way to Eaton Square, in the high-varnished brougham with the high stepping horse, so obnoxious to the envious eye of Reuben Howard. But his countenance was by no means so easy as his brougham. The features of the millionary were contracted by nervous twitches, like a man whose hat, or whose armholes, are too tight for comfort.

He was scarcely prepared, however, for the sight that met his eyes on reaching Eaton Square: old Roger, ensconced, though the month was June, and the weather seasonable, in a top-coat far from gauzy, escorting, with careful guardianship, up and down the sunny side of the square, the Bath chair in which reclined his own feeble little daughter. — For the heart of one of the most gifted men in England, was as comprehensive as his intellect.

Sir John was out of his carriage and by their side, in a moment. — "Had Constance been indisposed, that she was thus waited upon?"

"Only a slight increase of her usual state of languor," replied Farmer, looking far more like the father of the delicate child, than his spruce interrogator.

"But she had a fatiguing day yesterday, at the Dulwich Gallery. And we want to economize her strength a little, in hopes to fulfil a promise of taking her to the palm-house at Kew, and perhaps to Hampton Court, before we leave town for the summer."

"The *summer?*" reiterated his brother-in-law, — according to whose Londonized calendar, spring, or "the season," was only beginning.

"You forget that it is already June," replied Farmer, rather to his tone than to his words. "And we want to spend midsummer at Havermead. That poor woman must not be too much alone."

Sir John made no further remonstrance; but as they had now reached the house-door of the Farmers, they entered together. The more fatherly of the two, however, did not accompany his visitor into his library till Constance had been comfortably established in her school-room, and her dinner rung for.

"You are very good to that dear child, Farmer," said Sir John, more touched than was his wont by the tenderness of his old friend.

"She requires goodness — she is *very* delicate," he replied. "But I think she gains strength: — Sophy is convinced of it."

The father shook his head; he was more accustomed than Farmer to the company of healthful children.

"It would be too much to expect," added the

venerable lawyer, with a smile, as if trying to apologize to Sir John for the child's infirmities, "that, out of the seven grandchildren left by your parents, there should not be *one* ailing: especially since the others are so lavishly endowed by nature. Six handsomer, healthfuller young people, can scarcely be seen."

The man he addressed was evidently puzzled. He had got out of the habit of reckoning Olave Harpsden in the family. Nay, it was only since she resided under his roof, that he had looked on Hilda as a niece.

"There is certainly nothing to be said against their physical endowments," he at length replied. "And four of them might be cited as favoured by fortune, as well as nature. But where did you ever see that son of poor Carry's?"

"At Molyneux Castle, under circumstances the most trying: — and here, in my own house."

"Harpsden was quite unacquainted with the Dintons. — Even Gerald always kept him at arm's length. — Who on earth can have introduced his son at the Castle?"

"His cousin, your daughter," replied Farmer, a little astonished.

The countenance of Sir John now became as convulsed as though his boots as well as armholes had suddenly contracted.

"At the time of our great misfortune," added Far-

mer, "there was for a moment some idea that our dying friend, — our beloved friend, — was recovering sufficient consciousness to receive the last consolations of the church of which he was so firm and orthodox an adherent. The rector of his parish was disabled, — literally disabled, by grief, — from officiating. — Harpsden, from his tenets, as offensive to poor Dinton as to yourself, — was out of the question. But Netta, aware that the son (with whom she had some slight previous acquaintance, and had heard much, it seems, from her German cousin), had been sent for to afford spiritual comfort to his kinspeople at Ash Bank, despatched a messenger for him to Harrals. — He came; — but his services, alas! were never in requisition. That noble soul returned to the fountain-head of light, unexhorted and unannealed. — But the young man who had come among us for a purpose so sacred, soon made his way to our hearts, by his quiet good sense and good feeling; and, some time afterwards, when the mind of our poor Bessy was in such a state of excitement as to be inaccessible to the pleadings and arguments of her more familiar friends, I was myself the person to introduce Olave at Denny Cross. His gentle eloquence had deeply impressed me. A first-rate man, Wraysbury! — Well for our church if such intellects were often enlisted in her service!"

This explanation was both long and solemn. But Sir John had drawn it upon himself. All he found

to say in reply was, that the interference of Netta appeared somewhat extraordinary, since to *him* she had scarcely ever mentioned the name of her cousin.

"Did you not yourself forbid her? — I remember her naming something of the sort when she first spoke of him to Lady Jemima."

"Possibly. — It is scarce worth thinking about, — still less of discussing. — But perhaps, Farmer," he continued, "since you are so much more conversant than myself with my family affairs, you can also tell me whether the report be true that my nephew Wilchester is coming into parliament for Hurdiston?"

"If so, it must have been recently determined on," replied the old lawyer. — "I have heard nothing of it. — Of course his father will, at no distant time, establish him in public life. The question is, whether the lad himself, who is as right-minded as he is intelligent, would choose to be placed in parliament as a mere flunkey, to do what he is bid, like any other livery servant."

"Do you mean that you think him likely to desert his family colours, and renounce the opinions of the uncle who was as a father to him?" cried Sir John.

"Why not, — if they grate against his conscience? — But don't be afraid. — Accession to rank and fortune will soon draw the teeth of the lion's whelp. — Reflect, my dear Wraysbury, on the change wrought in your own opinions by the favours of Mammon!"

"A weightier stake in the country naturally compels a man to inquire more carefully into the sources of our national wealth and national stability," mouthed the millionary.

"In other words, your great landlord becomes instinctively a protectionist! — Well, I suppose it is so; and am therefore thankful that I never was a considerable landowner. When I saw you hold back from parliament, and refuse the seat for Wadhurst, in the outset of your career, I foresaw, John, what was coming. — Crustaceæ, naturalists inform us, always retire to holes in the rock, in order to change their shell."

"Thank you for the comparison. But I have never changed my shell. — It grew with my growth, and strengthened with my strength, till the young enthusiast became progressively sobered."

"Not so *very* gradually," rejoined old Farmer, with a smile. "I 'm afraid the day on which the Whig government refused to re-establish the barony of Fitz-Alwyne, in your favour, decided the matter."

A thrill of vexation vibrated in every fibre of the convicted baronet. The negociation alluded to by Farmer was one which he had believed to be as private and confidential as if transacted in the crypt of St. Faith's.

"It was scarcely fair, however, to put yourself up at such a price," added Farmer, good-humouredly.

"No ministry, with even an average share of prudence, could have conceded it. — Your pedigree broke down in two descents; and to have overlooked its defaults, would have been to establish a most dangerous precedent."

"The government in question had doubtless excellent advisers, both ostensible and inostensible," retorted Sir John, implying by a fiery glance, that he suspected his too well-informed brother-in-law of being one of the latter. "I certainly felt justified in applying for a distinction enjoyed for several centuries by my ancestors, to which a colossal fortune would henceforward enable me to do honour."

Old Roger remained as mute as a fish. — And Sir John had hoped to rouse him into a wrangle! —

"I conclude, then," resumed his visitor, after a pause, "that it is to the modification you perceive in my political opinions, I am indebted for the change in your regard which has for some years past been apparent?"

"The death of your wife tended perhaps in some measure to relax the intercourse between us," replied Farmer, perfectly unembarrassed by this home-thrust. — "But I remember once thanking you, John, for having secured me the best blessing of my days, — an excellent wife; and I am now still more deeply indebted, for the gift of a child as dear to me as if she were my own. — I should be an ungrateful

old brute, therefore, if any thing in my words or manner" —

"Enough, enough, my dear good friend!" said Sir John, snatching his hand, — for there were tears both in the old man's eyes and voice. — "I wished only to imply my fears that a certain degree of discrepancy between our political opinions, had tended to disturb our friendship."

"Hardly; since your opinions are supposed to be those of poor Dinton: whom I need not tell you I loved while living, and am mourning dead. They are, in fact, such as one ought to expect from your social position, as one expects cedars on Lebanon, or the hyssop on the wall. — And as I said before, Edgar will probably descend in time to their adoption."

"I trust so," said Sir John, drawing up to the utmost of his inches. "It would be indeed, painful to me, to have a son-in-law of other than conservative principles."

"A *son-in-law?*" reiterated the old lawyer, looking hard at him, as if for further explanation. — "Why, you surely don't imagine," he added after a pause, on finding Sir John reluctant to reply, "that there is malice prepense in his habit of calling Nonny his little wife?"

"Constance is twelve years old, I believe. — But his attentions to her elder sister leave little doubt of his attachment."

"Who is *not* attached to her, — dear, kind-hearted girl!"

"Nor will you deny that a match between them would be highly eligible for both parties?"

Farmer was silent.

"Rank on one side, — opulence on the other. On both, sufficient fortune and distinction to negative all possibility of being instigated by avarice or ambition."

"So far so good, certainly. — But I hate intermarriages in families; — repugnant to all laws, divine or human. — The two young people moreover appear to me peculiarly unfitted for each other."

"In what respect? — Their ages are well proportioned. Both are good-tempered, — good-looking, — high-spirited, — cheerful" —

"And both infirm of purpose, — easily guided or misguided, — and totally unfit for the administration of a great estate."

"They are young, my dear Farmer, they are young!"

"I have known younger heads endowed with six times their discretion. — I love them both dearly: — nobody better. — But I never wish to see them man and wife."

"My nephew, I suspect, would thank you little for that expression."

"He would be affronted, probably, at my calling him behind his back, as I often do to his face, unstable and thoughtless. But of designs on the hand of the heiress of Lynchcombe, I wholly acquit him."

"Perhaps, you have advised him against the marriage?"

"It was never mooted between us. Hitherto, Edgar has had the best of friends, confidants, and counsellors, in his much-loved uncle; and he, I know, was systematically averse to the idea of early marriages."

"If the question were to arise, therefore, you would, perhaps, dissuade him from the alliance."

"Not perhaps, — *unquestionably;* — and Netta too, were she to ask me. Let each of them acquire by marriage a companion of stronger powers of reasoning; to fortify their own weak characters, and subdue their over-sensitiveness of nature."

"I can only say, then, that I should consider such interference, on your part, a most unfriendly act," exclaimed Sir John. — "It is a great object to me to have my girl settled in life. — And nothing you can say will disturb my conviction that she would be as happy as the day is long, should she ever become the Viscountess Wilchester."

"I doubt whether he would have said, 'should she ever become Mrs. Molyneux,'" — observed Farmer to his wife, when anxiously recounting to her, in the course of their afternoon-drive, the particulars of his interview with her brother-in-law. — "Luckily, *his* opinions will not go far to accomplish the match. — But it is likely to be the cause of much vexation to us all, that he should think it desirable."

CHAPTER XIII.

The well-varnished brougham conveyed home to Carlton Gardens a far more discontented man than it had deposited in Eaton Square.

That his daughter, after all his prohibitions, should have taken Olave Harpsden by the hand, was a thorn in his side. That his infructuous petition for the dormant Barony of Fitz-Alwyne should have transpired, was still more mortifying. But that any one should presume to differ from him touching the eligibility of an alliance between the future Earl of Dinton and future Lady of Lynchcombe, caused the ire to wax hot within him. "Nevertheless, in spite of them all, the match shall be!" was his summary of the case; as though a million and a half of money rendered him absolute as a Shah of Persia, or manager of a patent theatre.

He resolved, in the first instance, to cross-question his daughter; selecting such a time and place as was most likely to place her off her guard. — One of the few occasions on which he officiated as her chaperon was in those daily rides beside the Serpentine, as pleasant to male gossips as to female equestrians; *and* right proud was he of the admiration excited by

the girlish grace of her seat, and her unusual skill as a horsewoman.

Thanks to Edgar and the Grandisons, Sir John Wraysbury passed, among the young men of the day, for a dry, disagreeable, purse-proud sort of man; a reputation which secured both the chaperon and the chaperoned from being joined by the troops of idlers who would otherwise have rejoiced to appear in the train of the new heiress. — Sir John soon found an unmolested moment, therefore, to observe, as their thoroughbred horses paced lightly together towards Kensington Gardens — "Your cousin, Olave, I believe, Netta, is no longer at Harrals?"

"He is at Cambridge, Papa. — Hilda showed me yesterday, in the Times, a statement of his having obtained his degree as Master of Arts."

"He has prospects, then, of preferment?"

"I fear not. — Edgar may, perhaps, induce Lord Dinton to make him his chaplain. His wife's nephew has really some claim upon him. But I understand that Olave has been offered a Professorship of History."

"At Cambridge? — Impossible!"

"Why impossible? — He took high honours. I don't understand that sort of thing; but once, when Hilda mentioned the subject before my brother, Harry exclaimed, that a man who had taken a double first,

was a fellow to touch your cap to, — 'ay,' he said, 'in the fastest run of the season.'"

"Why bear in mind the slang of that foolish boy! — But how is it that Hilda Wroughton knows so much about young Mr. Harpsden's honours and pursuits?"

"She is very fond of him, Papa; or perhaps I should say very *proud* of him," said Netta, blushing from the dread of having compromised her cousin. — "He was the first relation poor Hilda ever saw, except her father and mother. — Olave visited them in Germany, when every one else seemed to overlook them; and gave her much advice, and much comfort. — Besides, Hilda is naturally grave and studious; and it is only natural she should prefer a cousin who is studious and grave, to such rattles as Edgar and Harry."

As far as Olave was concerned, this simple explanation afforded much comfort to Sir John. For a moment, he had been tempted to fear that his daughter, after the wayward way of womankind, might have suffered her fancy to stray to this Admirable Crichton — at once so handsome and so accomplished. — But all was now clear. — Hilda was the offender. — Hilda was his patroness. But *her* preferences were matters of perfect indifference.

Whether her protégé were fated to progress into

Schoolmaster, Professor, or Bishop, she was welcome to share the honour, or the opprobrium. —

Just as he came to this mental conclusion, he noticed Lady Theodosia Molyneux, who was riding past, kiss her hand affectionately to Netta. But though the showy costumes of Alfred Le Dreux's equestrian studies were almost rivalled by her ladyship, as she was riding alone with Lord Wilchester, Sir John would have been well pleased to have her join her cousin: — *amazone à revers*, *montero à panache*, Algerine bridle and all. — Nor did he wish in vain. Some minutes afterwards, the canter of several horses in their rear, caused Janetta's mare to prance from the turf to the road, and in a moment, Theo. was by her side.

"Here are two old friends of the family, who want to be presented to you and Netta, Uncle Wraysbury," said her reckless ladyship; "and Edgar will have it that introductions made in the saddle are out of order, and count for nothing, — so I have taken upon myself the duties of chamberlain. Lord Frederick Hill — (his father and mother dined with you on Thursday, but he complains that, as a younger brother, he is never invited); — and Monsieur le Marquis de St. Marcel, sécrétaire de légation, et ministre ad interim, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, — as his visiting-card will in due time inform you."

Her two companions raised their hats to Dives, as their names and titles were thus wildly enounced.

But though Sir John returned with almost obsequious civility the bow of the Duke of Groby's son, — or rather the son of the great Duchess who had undertaken to officiate as Kornak to the heiress of Lynchcombe, — he could not so master his prejudices as to be equally courteous to the man whose whiskers emulated one of the Harrals gorse-coverts. Scornfully as he had alluded, in former days, to the dislike entertained by the poor old squire of Denny Cross for "forren parts," his own antipathy to "forren" guests was scarcely less narrow-minded. His visits to the Continent having been comprised in two or three hasty tours, in the course of which he had seen as much of good society as would be met with by a foreign traveller in the Thames steam-boats, he regarded *Messieurs les étrangers* almost as contemptuously as Reuben Howard looked upon himself. Especially in his capacity of parent and guardian to an heiress. He had learned enough from Mrs. Wroughton touching the manners and customs of the Continent, to be aware that every well-born, wealthy foreigner is contracted, almost as soon as born, to a well-born, wealthy bride; as exact a match, and selected with a care as sedulous as, in England, is bestowed only on a pair of phaeton horses; and that the foreigner who comes to England to seek a wife, does so because disqualified at home. — A few examples of English heiresses thus unhappily mated, were present to his mind whenever he

beheld even the best accredited of the *corps diplomatique* scraping their three bows of salutation to the heiress of Lynchcombe. He would almost as soon have seen her dancing with one of the Grandisons! But though, while he looked upon *them* as swindlers, *they* thought him a boor, it did not prevent even the superfine St. Marcel from treating him with the deference due to a *puissance étrangère* rejoicing in such a *chef* as Loncier, and a daughter whose week's income exceeded the *gros lot* of the *Lingot d' Or*.

Already, Sir John had determined that this polished pickpocket, whose smiles seemed to distil strychnine as his whiskers *eau de millefleurs*, should never enter his doors; and without much chance of his revoking, as in Edgar's case, the prohibitory decree. — But he had nothing to fear. His best security lay in his daughter's perfect purity of mind. The seclusion in which she had been educated, had secured her against all sickly sentimentality. Her tone of conversation was no less free from the levity which kept all Lady Theodosia's friends in alarm, than from the cant which is one of the worst affectations of the day. If Miss Avesford's system of education had been somewhat too pragmatical, it had preserved her pupil's ear and eye from all injurious influences.

To such a person, the complimentations of St. Marcel were as offensive, as the jargon of [illegible]derick Hill was unintelligible. How kin

considerate of Edgar, she thought, to have refused to introduce two such men to her acquaintance. On her return from her ride, she flew to express these feelings of gratitude to her cousin Hilda; who usually devoted the time of her absence to her easel; where she had already completely distanced her rival.

Very little praise, however, could Miss Wroughton ever be induced to concede to Lord Wilchester. — "If he thought so ill of these gentlemen," was her comment on the transaction, "why sanction an intimacy between them and his sister? — You met them riding together."

"Theo. seems to have known them from her childhood. Edgar cannot prevent his father and mother from receiving what company they think proper."

"If he had the least strength of character, he would exercise some authority, if not over Lord Dinton, at least over his mother and sister. But he is too selfish and inert to act up to even his limited sense of duty."

"You are very unjust. Brought up as he has been, in purple and fine linen, amidst all that is brilliant and all that is unprincipled, how can you expect him to be as severe a moralist as Olave, whose mind has never been softened by luxury; — who has been eating Spartan broth all his life, and teaching his little brothers their *propria quæ maribus*."

"Netta! — I scarcely thought you could be unge-

nerous," — said Miss Wroughton with flashing eyes.

"Forgive me, — forgive me, — I know I am wrong! — But you provoked me, Hilda. And if I am ungenerous, *you* are ungrateful. Edgar, though sometimes flighty in his way of talking to you, dearly loves you."

"Yes; so he pretends."

"But why should he pretend it?"

"I mean that he deceives himself. But he does not deceive *me*. His vaunted passion would no more stand out against the opposition of his father and mother, than the surface of yonder mirror against the book in my hand, were I to fling it in that direction. He would moan and whine, and write sentimental verses: and in twelve months, form some other engagement. Whereas Olave, loving once, would love for ever; solidly and surely, — in defiance of all obstacles, all dissuasions. But —"

There is no guessing to what disclosures the disjunctive conjunction might have been a prelude; had not Hilda's impatient attendant entered the room, with a message from Mrs. Wroughton, assuring the two young ladies they would have scarcely time to dress. The cousins had no choice but to separate.

But how different a being was the Netta who gathered up her habit to leave the room, from the happy thoughtless Netta who had entered it! — That

the lapse of those few short minutes should have sufficed to convert a child into a woman! — As when in autumn the fall of the leaf betrays to view the nest which the fulness of summer concealed among the branches, the secret of her heart had become apparent. For alas! her doom was sealed. The hopes

> That numberless upon her stuck as leaves
> Do on the oak, had with one winter's brush
> Fallen from their boughs, and left her bare
> To every storm that blows.

Mechanically she allowed her maid to complete her toilet. Not a word escaped her lips; not a glance of her fixed eyes strayed to any object in the room. The silk rustled around her; the lace fell in idle folds; the golden bracelet was clasped upon her arm. The gong sounded to summon her to dinner: and like one walking in a dream, she descended the stately stairs, filled by baskets of flowers, placed at intervals with the most exquisite fragrance. But the poorest creature extending her hand for charity amid the dust and hubbub of the adjoining streets was probably not half so sore at heart as at that moment, the heiress of Lynchcombe.

For more than half a year past she had been, unknown to herself, cherishing the conviction that she was a first object to both Edgar and Olave: — to one, of the tenderest love, — to the other, of the tenderest friendship. She had hoped that, at some

future time, her influence might induce her father to secure a worthier destiny to his gifted and ill-used nephew. She had hoped that, at some future time, she should be permitted to perfect the happiness of that lighter-hearted cousin so dear to all who had ever been dear to *her*. Though free from all missish speculation on such points, she had perceived from the first arrival in England of his parents, that such was their desire, — such the fondest wish of their wild but warm-hearted daughter. She had even noticed of late that all her father's objections to Edgar Molyneux had given place to favour towards Lord Wilchester.

And with all this, Edgar, continually at hand, — kinder and dearer than ever, — handsome, agreeable, courted by society, yet apparently devoted exclusively to herself; — dancing with her, riding with her, guarding her through crushing crowds, darting forward to claim her as a partner when about to be solicited by any person whom he knew to be distasteful to her. How was she to suppose, that these demonstrations of attachment were *mere* demonstrations? How was she to imagine that he was actuated only by the desire to secure her good offices with the real object of his love; and establish himself on a privileged footing in the house, where he might daily and hourly rejoice his eyes with the sight of his dear Hilda! —

As the conviction came fully upon her mind, like

a first frost cutting down the bloom of a flower-garden, so heavy a sigh rose from the depths of her heart, as seemed to announce that it was rent in twain. — Never could life be to her as it had been before. She might hereafter reconcile herself to her disappointment. But reason would never bring back the buoyant elastic sense of happiness which had brightened her latter days with the conviction that the joy she was feeling imparted joy to all around. A shadow had crept into the picture of life, which could never, *never* be removed.

Yet, though overwhelmed by this deep despair, she was forced to go through her accustomed routine of attentions to the Wroughtons, and conversation with her father. — She must seem as usual. She must smile as usual. She must talk as usual.

At her especial request, Mrs. Wroughton had been from the first installed at the head of the table; so that her own place was directly opposite to Hilda; and her eyes perpetually encountered the inquiring looks of this girl, — this woman, — this bitter enemy.

She bore it all with the courage inherent in female nature, — the courage arising from self-respect. She must not place her weakness at the mercy of one so powerful and so cold. As yet, no one had possessed the right to look down upon her. She must not abdicate *all* her privileges at once.

The task, however, was not a light one. — The others discussed cheerfully the topics of the day. — The open windows admitted the pleasant rustle of the trees and chirping of the birds, in the adjacent gardens. Every luxury that wealth can give, prevailed around her. The finest forced fruit was served on the choicest porcelain; the richest wines in the clearest crystal. All was as on preceding days: the same three companions, — the same group of well-drilled attendants. — But oh! what starvation, what cold, what hunger, what misery, in that poor young heart; — what helplessness in her nerveless frame! —

So long was the rich repast prolonged, that ere they rose from table, the sense of her wretchedness came as strongly upon her as when moved, by suddenly learning her father's safety after his wound; and she was on the point of fainting. Even Sir John, who had been ruminating over his disgust at the flippancy of his niece, the intrusiveness of the whiskered foreigner, and the superciliousness of Lord Frederick Hill, was struck by her paleness.

"You have overtired yourself this morning, Netta," said he. — "Riding, which agreed with you so well in the country, does not seem to suit you in town. You must give it up, my dear. To-morrow, you had better try the barouche."

As they passed out of the room, he took her hand and pressed it kindly: — a considerable demonstration

for his unloving nature. But if so much touched by the idea that his daughter was over-fatigued, what would he have felt and done had he known the truth!

On reaching the vestibule, where the gas had just been lighted, and all was bright as day, Miss Wraysbury's indisposition became manifest to her cousin; and by a natural movement, at other moments always welcome, Hilda extended her arm to clasp the waist of her companion, that they might ascend the stairs together. And though the poor girl felt as if enclasped in the coil of a serpent, she was forced to submit. She could not in her own house fling off the guest, — the poor relation, — the stranger within her gates!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE last thought of poor Netta, as she laid her throbbing head upon her pillow, and the first when she opened her eyes the following morning, was how to dispose of her day without collision with Hilda, yet without so avoiding her as to give offence. — For she was resolved that the explanation between them should not at present be pursued. She did not *wish* to learn the worst. She had not courage to step forward and gaze into the bottom of the abyss. Perhaps she might discover that she was a dupe as well as a victim; — that her softness had been laughed at as well as practised on. No, she would have no more *tête-à-têtes* with Hilda Wroughton.

The lessons of music, painting, and language which she shared with her cousin, though in a few instances adopted for improvement's sake, had been chiefly undertaken as a plea for her father to relieve Mrs. Wroughton from the heavy expense of her daughter's education. She had, therefore, no scruple about leaving her cousin to the solitary enjoyment of Signor Ignatio's lesson; and to dispose of her own morning, her choice lay between Piccadilly and Bruton Street, where her company was ever welcome. Hitherto, she

had felt hurt that her general invitation to both houses was not extended to the Wroughtons. But what a relief *now*, to feel that she commanded a retreat inaccessible to the treacherous Edgar's scornful love! —

Her leaning was towards the quiet household of the Dowager. — Those two gentle sisters-in-law of dear Aunt Bessy, who were such comfortable companions in times of sorrow, seemed to regard her with the same indulgent kindness conceded to her by their lost brother. Second thoughts, however, determined her to order the carriage to the more brilliant mansion, so much less suitable to her aching head and heart, where she was nearly certain of meeting Edgar. She wanted to see him again. She wanted to ascertain, not from the vauntings of her rival but by her own instincts, whether she had been self-deceived, or the object of deception. A single interview would enable her to determine whether he had been wilfully trifling with her affections, or whether her own weakness had misinterpreted mere cousinly kindness and good-will.

Merry laughter saluted her ears as the doors of the inner drawing-room were thrown open to announce her: — *so* merry, that she almost wished to retreat again. — For though her visit was too early to have been paid in London, at that hour, to any but near relatives, Lady Dinton's house so far retained the habits of the continent, that the evenings were dedicated to general society, while the favoured few ad-

mitted as morning visitors, could not come too early, or too often.

The laughter which had startled her, was that of Lord Frederick Hill. Reuben Howard had not interdicted to *him* or to the fashionable and *Hochgeborener* St. Marcel, the entrée of the house under his protection.

"You are come at a critical moment, my child," said the highly-wrought work of art into which Aunt Emma had progressed, holding up her rouged cheek to be kissed by her niece, as she sat beside what she called a writing-table, though it looked far more like one of Giroux's counters, over-crowded with useless trinkets of crystal, agate, lapis lazuli, malachite, Dresden, and Sevres. — "Just in time to forestal a bet between Theo. and Lord Frederick, who declares that you are about to become his sister-in-law."

Netta coloured deeply from surprise. The point of the joke, if a joke it were, escaped her.

"I merely said that my lady mother had so settled it," interposed Lord Frederick, "and that from the hour I was born, I never knew her set her mind on anything she did not accomplish."

"Sit down, *belle cousine*, for you look staggered, as well you may," said Lady Theodosia, establishing Netta in the corner of her own cozy little sofa, and untying and taking away her bonnet. "And *de pis en pire*, you seem both tired and ill. But you shall not

be bound to utter more than a single monosyllable in support of my assertion, that instead of being engaged to him, you are not so much as acquainted with Lord Harmondswyke."

Miss Wraysbury was just about to pronounce the "no" required of her; when she suddenly recollected that, at the Duchess of Groby's last *soirée*, she had presented to her — simply as "my son," — a shadowy resemblance to a human being, who muttered a few words "inaudible in the gallery;" — and that on his gliding away, Berty Grandison had whispered to her that she beheld the ghost of a future duke, who, with the help of a respirator and comforter, was able to confront the English climate occasionally during the dog days, — wrapt in a blanket, like a boa constrictor when the wind is easterly: — that his winters were spent in a boat on the Nile, dieted on birds'-nest soup, and the mulled milk of the cocoa-nut. — The whole affair had passed out of her mind, as one of the thousand *mauvaises plaisanteries* of Albert Grandison.

"I believe I *am* slightly acquainted with one of Lord Frederick's brothers," said she, with her usual gentle courtesy. "All but that slight acquaintance is the creation of his fancy."

"I rejoice to hear it," he replied, with a courtly bow. "It would be indeed unsatisfactory to commence an acquaintance with Miss Wraysbury with the re-

pugnance entertained by all younger brothers towards the bride of their *aîné* —"

"Like my husband's, against Bessy Pennington. Do you remember his frenzy at Naples?" interposed Lady Dinton, who, though she went scribbling on at her notes of invitation, kept half an ear open to the conversation.

"What a darling little duchess she would make!" cried Lady Theodosia, who was busy spoiling some beautiful water-colour drawings, by cutting them down to the proportions of her album. — "Only that as poor Lord Harmondswyke would require in a wife not a better half, but a better three-quarters, I am afraid she falls short of the standard proportions; besides being formed of *pâte tendre* rather than iron-stone. — And then, we can't spare her, — can we, Mamma? — As I told you just now, Lord Fred., she must be *my* sister-in-law, and not yours."

"Theo., Theo.!" remonstrated her mother, still bending over the blotting book.

"By the way, what is Wilchester about to-day?" inquired Lord Frederick. — "I met him and Dinton together in a brougham, in a very suspicious quarter of the town; and judged by the length of their faces that they were bound for the family lawyer's: to cut off the entail of a farm or two, — or order a fall of timber, — or some other of the mysteries confidentially

transacted between sires and sons, per aid of the black art and its blacker practitioners."

"Something nearly as bad," said Lady Dinton. "They were bound for the Euston Station for some county meeting."

"Ay, by the way, I remember now. The Duke and Harmondswyke went down to Groby Abbey this morning, looking exceedingly solemn."

"My brother, then, is probably gone?" exclaimed Lady Dinton, addressing her niece.

"He is out of town for the day," she replied. "I was not aware that he was gone to Northamptonshire."

"Then you must positively spend the day with us, my dear Netta. I will write word to Clara that I have detained you, and send back the note by the carriage," resumed Lady Dinton: — a welcome proposition to Netta, certain that her father would approve the arrangement.

"But how comes it," inquired Lord Frederick of Lady Dinton, while her daughter proceeded to dispatch the note to Carlton Gardens, — "how comes it that Wilchester has grown so much more amiable of late? — Gone down with his governor to the turnips, like the best of boys; and my uncle Reuben (who knows every body's business long before they know it themselves) tells me the Hurdiston election job is settled, and that the *louveteau* has ceased to howl. Which of you has wrought the miracle?"

"The weakness of human nature; by which far more miracles are wrought than by its strength," said the Countess. "You, my dear Lord Frederick, who have known Edgar ever since he was as high as the table, must remember that he always prefaces yes by no, — and no by yes; the most inconsistent mortal that ever breathed. But since his uncle's death, he and his father have become better friends. He is wise enough to succumb in trifles; and will probably get his own way in the end."

"By trifles, meaning such things as politics, — perhaps religion; — for Dinton informed me that his son has been besetting him for a living for some reverend cousin, whose father hovers on the verge of Romanism; and my friend Edgar is, I know, nearly as low Church as his late uncle."

"Let him obtain livings for his cousin, and welcome, — a prebend if he can — "said Lady Dinton, as much ruffled as was consistent with the preservation of the crispness of her *toilette.* "But I hope he will not be expecting *me*, when established at the Castle, to notice all his rusty *protégés.* Quite out of the question. — Even at Harrals, these Harpsdens are not received."

Lord Frederick, well aware of the sort of respect entertained by the Dintons and their flugelman, his uncle Reuben, for Sir John W. W. and his opinions, laughed in his very wide sleeve. — He contented him-

self with observing, that by the blessing of Providence, country cousins and the *corvée* they entail, were disappearing from the face of the land: — "no more golden pippins," said he, "no more pug-dogs, cabbage-roses, Joan Blunts, or Tony Lumpkins. — Sunday-schools and steam have created a new world."

Poor Netta wondered what they were all laughing at so heartily. — For some minutes past, *she* had been pondering over this living, — solicited, no doubt, at the entreaty of Hilda. — The secret understanding of the three cousins seemed almost like a conspiracy *against* her! —

Her only comfort throughout that dreary day, consisted in the certainty that when the door opened, no Edgar would make his appearance. But for that security, the high spirits of Theodosia, and the exaggerated tenderness of Aunt Emma, would have been almost as importunate as they had been in Wilton Place, some fourteeen years before.

On the following day, at the last drawing-room of the season, the two cousins were to be presented; and much girlish competition had lately prevailed between them, concerning their respective fineries: — Theodosia maintaining the superior taste of Paris and Victorine, — Netta, the superior local experience of Gladman and Foster. — But now, the heiress had lost all interest in the question. Had she dared, she would have pleaded indisposition as a pretext for absenting

herself altogether. But her father, the Duchess of Groby, and Sir Pottifer Hampson, united, formed a Cerberus whose barkings she shrank from encountering.

But in her presentation dress, enriched by the family diamonds which, sorely against her will, her father insisted upon her wearing, the listless, pale, dispirited heiress of Lynchcombe excited universal sympathy. — A fortune so exceptional, so far exceeding that of any unmarried female in the kingdom, had, of course, created proportionate envy, and some degree of ill-will; — those who had neither son, brother, nor nephew desirous to pretend to her hand, being prepared to discover or invent disparagements, either in her pedigree or person.

When, however, instead of the haughty, airy, overweening damsel anticipated in the person of the heiress, there appeared a pale, gentle, depressed, and unassuming girl, who, by the side of the towering duchess, looked like a delicate blossom of the wood-sorrel at the foot of a gigantic oak-tree, every heart warmed towards her. Could this be the daughter of the millionary Sir John Wraysbury? — Could this be the heiress of Lynchcombe? — Which, among the daughters of fashion, was half so humble or so gentle!

All, however, were not thus merciful.

"A poor undersized little thing," said an ex-lady of the bed-chamber, whose offspring were as colossal as

Mastodons, and whose very features were limbs. "But for her money, who would ever notice her?"

"*But* for her money, I should fall in love with her on the spot," interposed her son, — a young peer of the highest merit and consequence. "Rich as she is, however, I have no doubt she fancies every man who looks at her, has designs on her fortune; and would not ask to be introduced to her for the world."

Even the little pages of the household, no higher than a grenadier's cap, were eager for a glimpse of the débutante.

"Look at the girl in white and silver, Georgy," said one of them to his companion-page, who was at home from Eton for the day. "*That's* the famous Miss Wraysbury: — the gratest heiress in England; — beats Miss Coutts by ever so many chalks. — How I should like to run away with her! — Wouldn't I have a stunning brace of guns, — and hire a deer forest, — and build a steam-yacht, — that's all!"

"As if such a bundle of bank-notes would stoop to an ensign in the Guards: — the most *you'll* ever be, Bob, — even if you're not spun in your examination. — Why, they say a duke was bespoke for her the very day she was born; and Alan Hill, my long cousin, in the Life-Guards, (whose mother presents Miss Wraysbury to-day,) declares that her father spends his life with Burke's Peerage in his hand, pricking for a son-in-law."

"What a bore, — to know that your daughter will be married for money; and have to shell out to some Shylock in peer's robes, who would not care if she were hanged!"

"Only right that there should be some hardships even for an heiress," retorted the precocious philosopher of the white satin *aiguilette*. — "But look at her governor! — What a snob — What a sneak — He looks thoroughly ashamed of himself; but not half so much as I should be of *him*, were I to marry the girl."

The spirits of Sir John were indeed pitched in their lowest key. Not on account of the snubbing he had received from Roger Farmer; for his worldly eye was beginning to require a coronet prefixed to the bulls that laid his kingdom under an interdict. But because at the agricultural meeting at which he had been compelled to make his appearance, the acclamations lavished on the new Earl of Dinton and his son, mortified him as deeply as though "the fickle breath of popular applause" were a thing whose price was above all his millions.

Against himself, the demonstration had been not only deep, but loud. — The moment he appeared, cries of "Who killed Kit Bothamley and Joe Burdon?" — issued from the crowd. "A man's life for a hare's!" — "Where's the good Earl of Dinton?" — and similar allusions, far plainer than pleasant, pointed him

out as an object of popular detestation. Such outcries are readily silenced by police inspectors and other guardians of the public peace. But the feelings in which they originate are not so easily put down. — He was, consequently, profoundly mortified. — Moreover, "Earl Percy saw his fall!" — His brother-in-law, Gerald, on whose neck his foot had weighed so heavily in former days, arrived in all the pomp of rank and fortune, as if expressly to witness his degradation.

Nothing said or done on the part of her father, therefore, tended to cheer the spirits of poor Janetta. — A few nights afterwards, they proceeded together to a court-ball, from the fatigue of which the age of the Duchess of Groby held her exempt; — and eagerly as the poor heiress had looked forward to her first appearance at one of those brilliant fêtes, she wandered about on her father's arm like a beautiful spirit rather than a joyous girl. While the forbidding face of Sir John kept partners at a distance, the pensive countenance of his daughter seemed to abstract her from the interests of the scene.

Albert Grandison, in his diplomatic uniform, had soon engaged Lady Theodosia for a quadrille.

"What *can* be the matter with your cousin?" was his first inquiry. "And where is Wilchester?"

"My brother, to the great indignation of the authorities, went off from Northampton to Havermead,

for a few days, on his road to town. Netta, I hope, is pining for his absence."

"Not a bit of it! — Every one believes that the poor girl is in a state of despair, because she is sentenced to be married, *nemine* (but herself) *contradicente*, to that deplorable Lord Harmondswyke, — as dry as mummy's dust, and as impassive as an iceberg."

"Lord Harmondswyke? — Impossible. Netta told me the other day at the drawing-room, when I pretended to congratulate her, that not twenty words had passed between them."

"Of course not. You don't suppose that heiresses to seventy thousand a-year are wooed in the usual vulgar style of courtship? — Miss Wraysbury has doubtless been addressed, like a crowned head, *par procuration*. I dare say the whole affair was settled in some musty old cupboard in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Here comes my uncle. Netta is probably dancing. Let us ask him," said the reckless girl, extending her hand, in spite of all Berty Grandison's entreaties, to detain Sir John Wraysbury; who was sauntering beyond the ropes, at the rear of the dancers, in company with a venerable K. C. B., whose uniform was so profusely crowded with orders, that it looked as if it required a Supplement. "Is it true, uncle," she hastily inquired, "that you are going to make a duchess of poor Netta?"

"Not that I am aware of," he replied; — too de-

sirous to conciliate any member of the Dinton family, to manifest his disgust at the flippancy so displeasing to him in the manners of his niece. Ungifted with the indulgent nature of Roger Farmer, he had no forbearance with the faults of a girl whose high spirits had never been worn down into decency by the iron roller of a patent governess.

"Then what makes her look so pale to-night?" persisted Lady Theodosia. "I am getting quite miserable about her! — I do believe she is fretting on account of the uncivil treatment you received, last week, from your Northamptonshire constituents."

Luckily, a *chaîne des dames* carried off at that moment the reckless partner of Berty Grandison; who, as he afterwards informed her, had fully expected to witness the spontaneous combustion of Sir John, whose wrath waxed too hot for words.

His attention had, however, been directed, by his niece's impertinence, to the dejected air of his daughter; of whose beauty never had he felt so proud as that night. — Her extreme youth, her simplicity of dress and deportment, interested every one in her favour; and procured him congratulations not only from certain of his grey-beard brothers of the senate, but from more than one dignitary of the Law, — the brethren of his professional days; — who, albeit unused to the haunts of dissipation, were periodically present at those royal fêtes which unite with Princes

of the Blood and Cornets of the Life Guards, Chancellors of the Exchequer wearing half the bullion of the nation upon their seams, and owl-like Lord Chancellors, past, present, and future, endeavouring to look, — some less wise, — others far wiser, — than nature, or the woolsack, ever exacted of mortal man.

When Netta returned to him, leaning on her partner's arm, almost before he had time to notice the languor and paleness mentioned by his niece, they were accosted by Lord Dinton, looking, in his new militia uniform, very like a pair of long-limbed scissars in a sheath of scarlet morocco; who asked leave — (that Gerald Molyneux should live to ask such leave! —) to present to them "Mr. Howard, the brother of their friend the Duchess of Groby." Yes! old Reuben condescended for the nonce to be simply Mistered, — like the merest snob, or the most respectable householder in the parish of St. Pancras, — and solicit an introduction to the man who, according to his statement, infected the West End with the scent of bank notes, in order to make acquaintance with the heiress!

Even Lord Dinton had presumed to remonstrate, ere he obeyed. But Reuben, though one of those who rarely rise to explain, informed him in a few peremptory words, that the Duchess of Groby had set her heart on having Miss Wraysbury for a daughter-in-law.

"My sister and nieces," said old Reuben, "are all

in love with her. At Groby House, they call her 'the Daisy,' and declare that nothing so pretty, or so pleasing, has, for ages, made its appearance in society."

"And to which of your nephews is she destined?" inquired the Earl, as they slowly made their way towards Sir John.

"Any one of them she pleases, — from the heir-apparent to Lord Clarence, the youngest, and his mother's pet. — But even Harmondswyke, who has never uttered a syllable in praise of womankind since he was in love with the Soldan's daughter, or the sister of a Cacique, or some other bronze-coloured inhabitant of a climate where orchids and palm-trees are indigenous, and the thermometer stands at one hundred and fifty degrees in the shade, — has been heard to whisper that your niece is as fair as a plumed moth — the prettiest insect in the British Museum."

And behold, before Netta was fairly replaced on her father's arm, the man of THE world was button-holding Sir John, immersed in the details of the following night's debate; — astonishing the county member by informing him of all that was likely to be said, and every thing that was certain *not* to be done, by government and its opponents.

For old Reuben would have scorned to enlarge upon a *fait accompli*, — unless as an historical anecdote extracted from the *Hortus Siccus*, (and very dry

it was,) of his private journal. His genius was essentially speculative, vaticinative, and oracular. And, thanks to his extensive connexions in society, and talent for skimming the cream of other people's information, the churning he brought into the market was prodigious. — From his very silence much was inferred; and his "fast" or "slow," regulated many an important dial. When emperors and stocks were falling, Reuben's movement was "andante." — But even in his cheeriest mood, when some old friend's magnum of claret proved corked or banker failed, or book was reviewed by Croker, or his favourite for the Derby broke down, or wife eloped, or hopeful became a defaulter, he seldom exceeded "Largo;" too well-bred for any vulgar vehemence of demonstration.

After honouring Miss Wraysbury with a sufficient number of remarks concerning her bay mare and her skill in its management, to constitute what he considered an acquaintance with the heiress, he glided away to his more appropriate sphere; to talk back-stairs politics and Stock Exchange *canards* transmitted by the last telegraph, to one or two men of his own years, who looked like harpies in court suits, but whose words were as the edge of the sword, and whose signatures as the balance of the Royal Mint. — But it was in vain Lord Dinton endeavoured to render the disconsolate Netta aware of the importance of the introduction.

"*That* old gentleman a great man? — That Mr. Howard, the only modern representative of the king-making Earl of Warwick?" she exclaimed. "Impossible!" —

Janetta thought it very kind of her uncle, who, perceiving that she was out of spirits, took the trouble to invent a joke, — though a poor one, — for her amusement. So recently out of the hands of Miss Avesford, she had not yet renounced her school-room standard for the admeasurement of "great men."

CHAPTER XV.

SURELY the Scripture laudation of the beneficence of the Creator, who "sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust," might be extended to the mercy which vouchsafes it to the city as well as the plain?

So thought, at least, the Farmers; when, after quitting London on the day of the royal fête, in the midst of a summer shower that served only to stir up unsavoury odours, and convert offensive dust into clammy mud, they arrived at Havermead, to find the fields steaming with grateful moisture, — the air all fragrance, — the earth all bloom, — the shrubberies all music.

A more perfect spot, of its limited proportion, could scarcely be conceived; for during the last twenty years, it had been the favoured home of a master spirit.

But it cut both the kindly visitors of Havermead to the heart, to turn from its beautiful shrubs and pleasant lawn, to the altered face of the suddenly-aged woman, who stepped forward to receive them in the porch. The expression of her countenance, indeed, if not cheerful, was mild and tender as ever. But her hais was white as snow, and her eyes dim and hollow.

She had not, however, assumed a widow's garb, or the costume, no longer rare in England, of a Sister of Mercy. For Bessy held not to forms; and her gayest dress had been always so nearly approaching to conventual, that there was little need of change to announce it as that of a mourner. It was from her face a stranger would have learned that the woman before him was a widow indeed.

She welcomed them without a tear, — almost with a smile; — and claimed their congratulations on the amended health of her poor old father, in whom the change of air had wrought a wonderful improvement.

"This darling will improve here, too," said she to her sister, on installing Constance in the sunny room prepared for her. And Mrs. Farmer had soon the comfort of perceiving that Bessy, in her pious self-government, endeavoured to pursue her customary avocations, and maintain the habits and duties established by him who was gone.

The late lord had been singularly partial to the place: — his retreat from the Castle, whenever its quiet routine was molested for a time by the levity of Gerald and his wife. At Havermead, he had enjoyed his literary leisure, and formed his plans for the future. His cottages, his pensioners, his trees, his flowers, his pets, had occupied his time too pleasantly to admit of

repending his forbearance in ceding his place at home to the enjoyment of his younger brother.

And now that every thing at Havermead had reached perfection, — that all his projects were realized, — that Bessy herself was seated under the spreading branches of the great cedar, — that noble heart had ceased to beat!

Once only did Bessy allow herself to allude to the subject, in conversing with the two persons so highly valued by Lord Dinton; and that was in terms of thankfulness.

"Had I been younger," she murmured, "all this would have been hard to bear. But at my age, so few are the years that divide us, and so undeviating is my confidence in our eternal reunion, that it would be indeed rebelling against Providence, which assigned us so many happy years, to murmur against this temporary separation."

Those to whom she addressed herself saw, however, that, though she did not murmur, not a gleam of sunshine remained on earth for Bessy.

Next day, when Sophia was sauntering alone with her under the shade of a double range of lime trees bordering the Ouse, whose waters were just then covered with water-lilies opening their golden hearts to the sun, she began to talk with much affection of Lord Wilchester, her recent guest.

"Edgar had advised an iron fence to skirt the

river, before Nonny's arrival. Edgar had suggested a garden-chair for her use. Edgar, to whom all the plans of his late uncle had been disclosed during his frequent visits to Havermead, had given her many valuable hints."

"He interested himself, then, in his old haunts and pursuits?" inquired Sophy, anxiously. "I am rejoiced to hear it. *We* consider him sadly out of spirits."

"None of us, I fancy, have been very cheerful during the last few months," rejoined her sister. "But we are taught that we must not make an idol of our sorrow. And Edgar has returned into society and endeavoured to play his usual part, as his uncle, could he still commune with him, would desire."

Mrs. Farmer scarcely liked to suggest to her, — to *her* whose whole existence was filled with the memory of that beloved object, — that it was no longer over the loss of his uncle they believed Edgar to be fretting.

A moment afterwards, Bessy inquired after her darling Netta; and pleasant was it to answer that she was generally admired, — universally beloved. "All that her mother could wish to see her become," was Sophy's ample description.

"And happy?" persisted Bessy, who, not being of London, Londonish, made dead points at the truth.

"What shall we say?" inquired Sophy, looking to-

wards her husband, to prompt her reply. — "At all events, if happy, certainly neither gay nor cheerful.— Farmer and I cannot help sometimes watching her pale face, and fearing there is 'a worm i' the bud.'"

"*Another!*" murmured Bessy, in her saddest accents. "I had hoped that *she* at least might be happy. — But why should I repine? — Formerly, my utmost fear was, that the heart within her might be scorched up by too vivid a glow of worldly sunshine. — Where, dearest Sophy, *where* is perfect happiness vouchsafed! — Look at that dear child — Look at Edgar — Neither of them content!"

"Edgar has a good deal to try his patience. The proceedings of his father and mother jar hourly against his sense of right. Then, Farmer informs me that they disagree in politics; and that Lord Dinton will not, on that point, allow his son liberty of conscience, or even time for reflection. Young as Edgar is, his father considers it indispensable to the honour of the family, that he should be in parliament"

"Consistent, at least, in his absurdities! In early life, the torment of his brother — in later, of his son."

"The result of which is, that in all his perplexities, it is to my husband Edgar has recourse."

"He is fortunate to have such a councillor at hand."

"I sometimes think he might have a better," replied Sophy, with a smile. "In questions of right and wrong, Farmer is, I admit, an oracle."

"And are there any other, then?" inquired her sister, gravely, leading Mrs. Farmer to a rustic seat under the drooping trees, just where a turn of the river displayed to advantage those gently flowing waters: for Bessy, no longer strong, had already overtaxed her powers.

"There are points of conventional form," resumed Sophia, "essential to be observed in Edgar's position, in which my husband is not a fair umpire, because he thoroughly despises them."

"I own I am inclined to concede little importance to anything despised by *him*," said Bessy, well remembering how entirely her brother in-law's judgment had been prized and deferred to by him who was gone. — "And even to the flimsiest of these dilemmas, the immutable principle of right and wrong must surely be applicable?"

"Those who live in the world, Bessy, — thank Heaven, my dearest sister, that you have never been one of them, — know that there are certain cessions to custom, — certain capitulations of opinion — which become minor duties, when they secure the advantage of the many; — nay, even of a few, when those few possess claims on our love and obedience."

"Do you mean that you consider the parents of poor Edgar entitled to the cession of *his* principles, — perhaps of his affections?"

"You push me home, — and I see you have some

guess at the truth," replied Mrs. Farmer. — "But I *do* hold that he had better abstain, for a time, from public life, till he is certain of the stability of his own opinions, rather than publicly throw down the gauntlet to his father."

"There I agree with you. Most men abjure in later life their first outburst of schoolboy enthusiasm. Even we gardeners, Sophy, remove the early buds of a favourite plant, that the blossoms of its maturity may expand more freely."

"Nor would I have him marry in opposition to his father's will. He is not old enough to be certain of himself. Better sacrifice a precocious blossom or two," resumed Mrs. Farmer, smiling at the simile, supplied by her sister's simple experience, — "that the happiness of his married life may acquire fuller perfection." — While she spoke, her eyes were fixed on two objects in the distance, which proved to be Constance and her fond preceptor; who had not only drawn on shore one of the water-lilies, of which she coveted a nearer inspection, but recited to her, in illustration of the flower, the appropriate adventure of Cowper and his dog Beau, and as much of the mournful history of the author of her favourite "John Gilpin," as was adapted to her comprehension. For in such guise did the kind old man effect the education of his adopted child.

"These showy nenuphars lose half their beauty when withdrawn from their proper element," said he,

to the two companions between whom he now seated himself. "When buoyant on the surface of the stream, one can understand the sentiment of the Hindoos, in selecting them as the throne of their Cupid, Camdéo: but one must not see them too near." Adding a moment afterwards, the lines from Webster's Duchess of Malfi, prefixed to the present work:

> Glories, like glowworms, far away shine bright,
> Which, look'd-to near, have neither heat nor light.

A heavy sigh was Bessy's response to the quotation.

"How applicable," said she, "to the fate of those of whom we were talking when you joined us, — Netta, and Wilchester!"

As little Constance, instead of lingering by their side, was strolling along the banks of the Ouse, he did not hesitate to inquire why she classed them together.

"Because both, I fear, have bestowed their affections where no good result can follow."

"Mere calf-love!" replied the old Q.C., impatiently. "At their age, what can they know of real attachment? — You must not affix too much importance to the crossing of these idle fancies. A little disappointment, and a great deal of reflection upon it, may be of advantage to both."

"At their time of life, we should not so have argued," said Bessy, kindly.

"Nor would my husband, now, were Constance instead of Netta the sufferer," rejoined Mrs. Farmer, reproachfully.

"Well then, — since I am to be lectured on both sides," he good-humouredly replied, — "let us fully consider the case. When Edgar returned, a year ago, from visiting his friend Grandison, the Frankfort *attaché*, he alluded without much reserve, and with unqualified disgust, to his mother's brother-in-law, Wroughton, residing there; one of those privileged black-legs admitted into continental society, though pretty generally believed to be deserving of the hulks. — I felt thankful that the boy had escaped being victimized by this dangerous relative. But of the daughter, the rogue said not a syllable. — Are we to blame him? — Could one expect him to distress his uncle by confessing, unasked, that he was in love with a swindler's daughter?"

"Certainly not, if, conscious of the evils of the attachment, he had already promised himself to overcome it," replied Bessy.

"I do not believe he either perceived the evil of the attachment, or intended to overcome it," was Farmer's firm reply. — "His passion, which originated in the startle of finding a beautiful and accomplished girl in a house where he had expected only vileness and disgrace, was not a little stimulated by discovering that the lofty sentiments of this Teutonic Aspasia

were inspired by another cousin, whose visit to the banks of the Main had pre-chanced his own."

"You lower him, indeed, if you suppose that pique and jealousy are the motives of his love!"

"I consider his love mere moonshine. The only point on which I blame him is, that, when endeavouring to establish a footing at Harrals for the sake of Hilda Wroughton, he did not frankly explain his motives, — I don't say to the elders of the family, — but to that kind, loving little girl."

"The very words I used to him when, the other day, he was explaining on this very bench the difficulties of his position!" cried Bessy. "But at that period, he says, his position so thoroughly disqualified him from pretending to the hand of an heiress, and Sir John Wraysbury, (which I can well believe), was at such pains to make it apparent to him, that he thought himself privileged to cultivate the friendship of little Netta, as the kindest of cousins. Her merits, and above all, her conduct to the poor Wroughtons, soon however, attached him to her for life."

They were interrupted by the arrival of little Constance, heated, panting, bareheaded, — with her bonnet full of treasures collected during her ramble; and anxious fears that she might suffer from fatigue and exposure, soon distracted their thoughts from the hardships of the heiress.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNQUIET, meanwhile, most unquiet, were the days of that absent sister. — Everything conspired against her. The chasm which had opened between her and the object of her girlish affection, divided her also from her bosom friend. To live with Hilda, as before, was an act of hypocrisy of which she was incapable: to live with her otherwise than before, was to expose the secret of her heart.

And to whom could she turn for consolation? Had she allowed her father to suspect that she was unhappy, he would have searched into the depths of the mystery; and made it perhaps a plea for withdrawing his bounty from the Wroughtons. Her two kind aunts were no longer in London. Even Miss Avesford, — to whom the force of early association might, in her troubles, have reunited her, was settled at Aberdeen, as the wife of a Professor. — There was, literally, no resource for her against Aunt Clara and her daughter, but the domestic circle of Edgar's foolish, fluttering parents; — if that could be called a domestic circle, which included every other foolish flutterer stamped with the Hall-mark of *haut ton*.

The worst of it was, that Sir John, in his eager-

ness to demonstrate to his nephew his favourable change of sentiments, became almost abject in his courtesies. Though Lord Wilchester had now all but deserted the house, the millionary was never weary of assuring him that a cover was laid for him daily in Carlton Gardens, and a seat reserved for him in their box at the Opera and French Play: — to the utter anguish of the poor pale girl who was occasionally forced to be present at the interviews between the uncle and nephew. Not often; — never, with her own consent. But in the hurry of a London season, people are sometimes reluctantly forced into collision.

"I do believe it is *your* fault, Netta, that Edgar is becoming so distant," said Sir John. "You never show him the least attention, or take the smallest interest in his pursuits. Complete perversity! — Before I grew accustomed to his foreign manners, or rather before he had outgrown the flightiness of his foreign habits, and I really almost disliked him, you made it a point to harass me by his society. — And now that I should often be glad of it, — Harry being too young for a companion, — you drive him away from the house by your marked incivility."

"You used to reprove me, Papa, at Harrals, for encouraging his visits."

"I expected you to say so. — *More* perversity! — Because I did not approve of *tête-à-tête* drives and walks, which deprived his poor uncle of his society,

you now pretend a previous engagement in Piccadilly, every time Wilchester dines at my table."

It was not for Janetta to hint that Edgar had not lately made his appearance there, unless after an excess of importunity which made her blush for her father and herself.

It was the only instance, however, in which Sir John condescended to humble himself. Since he had assumed the unrestricted enjoyment of his splendid income, he had grown as proud as King Hezekiah of his vessels of gold and vessels of silver, his chariots and horses. — In these things alone did he put his trust. — Like most rich men, he consorted chiefly with the rich; for there is an affinity between gold and gold, which seems to unite in closest amity the children of Mammon. — No longer the softened invalid of Northampton, the new M.P. was becoming robust, arbitrary, and overbearing. — But it was her sad experience of this which not only increased the reserve of his daughter, but rendered her doubly careful of exposing his sister and niece to his displeasure.

As is so often the case in the perplexities created by human waywardness, a few words of explanation between Miss Wraysbury and Hilda, would have brought them to a satisfactory understanding. But those words were not to be spoken. — The sentence, incomplete as it was, by which Miss Wroughton had intimated that the heart and hand of Lord Wilchester

had been placed at her disposal, raised such a tumult in the feelings of the astonished girl, that she was unable to judge with her usual candour and temper. Though the intimation had been given in the kindliest spirit, she fancied that her dark-browed, lofty-minded cousin was exulting over her.

And the altered deportment of Miss Wraysbury consequently filled her with indignation. Hilda was one of those who stoop not to deprecate or explain. People who chose to misapprehend her, must remain in their error; — conciliation was not her turn. — She therefore allowed the breach to widen, day by day;— and took her lessons, and pursued her studies, alone. Netta was older than herself, — greater than herself, — richer than herself. Any advances therefore towards a happier state of feeling between them, must come from the heiress; whereas her contempt for what she considered wounded pride or a start of temper on the part of one she had loved so dearly, was by the sick heart of Janetta imputed to scorn of a defeated rival. — The misunderstanding between them was complete.

Poor patient Mrs. Wroughton, over her knitting, began at length to perceive that something was amiss.

"We see less of Netta than we used," said she, one day, to her daughter; "but it is not to be wondered at. Sought and admired as she is, in the great world, *it* must seem dull enough to her to come home to two

humdrum relatives, in deep mourning, unable to sympathize in her gaieties."

"Not to be wondered at, perhaps, — but much to be regretted," replied Hilda, gravely. "Not on *our* account, but hers. I had hoped she possessed more strength of character."

"Netta is but a child," said Mrs. Wroughton, picking up her ball of lambs-wool.

"I am a year younger, mother; but were I in her place, I should not allow myself to be estranged by new friends and new faces, as *she* has been from *me*. She wants *heart!*" said Hilda, her own swelling proudly within her, yet not equalling in tenderness, within hundreds of degrees, the gentle one that ached so sorely, just then, beneath the silken draperies of the heiress of Lynchcombe.

One day, aware that Lord Wilchester was out of town, trout-fishing at Stockbridge, she was preparing to spend the morning with Lady Mary Molyneux, whom she occasionally accompanied to the Chiswick Gardens (as the nearest approach to country they could command), when Sir John stalked into the room, holding an open letter.

"May I ask, Janetta," said he, addressing her in his sternest tones, "whether you are privy to the extraordinary communication I hold in my hand?"

Her first apprehension was, that one of her bills sent in to her father exceeded his notions of judicious

economy. — She had no regular allowance. But though Sir John had given her to understand that her personal expenditure might extend to a thousand a-year, in order to govern her liberalities, or perhaps to cramp her independence, he chose that the payment should pass through his hands.

"May I look at it, Papa?" said she, feeling a little nervous. Yet with the exception of some newly-introduced New Zealand plants, sent down to Havermead, she was unconscious of any act of lavish expense.

A single glance convinced her that the paper was not a bill. The date was "Guards' Club," — the signature, "James Willoughby Grandison." Having no wish to see further, she returned the letter to her father.

"What can Captain Grandison have written to you about?" said she, quietly. "He spoke of having a cob to sell, that would suit Harry for rabbit-shooting, during his holidays. — But I gave him no encouragement to make the offer."

"Nor any *other* offer, Janetta?" demanded Sir John, with still knitted brows. Then, perceiving by the unembarrassed manner of her reply that she was really unprepared for the communication, he burst into a flow of invective against the presumption of a whipper-snapper subaltern in the Guards, like Jem Grandison, a younger son of the squire of Blandhurst, in daring to offer her his hand.

That he was seriously angry, she could scarcely believe; or she would have resisted her inclination to laugh at the whole affair. But, recollecting that Edgar had predicted such a proceeding on the part of the most self-conceited of the Royal Bearskins, and that since her arrival in town, he had more than once warned her giving him the slightest encouragement, she began to reproach herself.

"Be on your guard, Netta," said he. "Jem is a professed *mangeur de cœurs;* and dresses young ladies' hearts on little spits, as Frenchmen their Orders, and Loncier his larks. — One civil word, and he will make you the talk of his battalion."

But it was less the realization of this prophecy, than her perception of the intense mortification of Sir John, at the first proposal made to her coming from such a quarter, that reduced her to gravity. After all his dinners and duchess-hunting, that the first shot should be fired by a younger son of his contemned Dorsetshire neighbour, was indeed mortifying! —

No man, perhaps, had ever greater justification for exorbitant views for his daughter. At his Club, — at the House, — at Speaker's dinners, and Mansion House feasts, — it had become a favourite mode of accosting him, to ask *when* his beautiful daughter was going to be married — and what peer of the realm was to be the happy man? — Half of these compliments were ironical, — though the millionary had not the tact to

perceive it. — At the Carlton, and elsewhere, he was, in fact, as much of a butt as is likely to be made of a man How d'ye do-ed by Reuben Howard, and rejoicing in such a *chef* as Loncier. But, like most of those who make, at fifty, that début in the *beau-monde* for which five-and-twenty is the fitting age, a certain degree of ridicule attached to Sir John Woolston Wraysbury. A man of stronger mind would have shaken off the infection, "like dew-drops from a lion's mane." But *his* perceptions were too completely buried in his pockets to admit of even suspecting he was laughed at. — That such a consummation could befall a man with seventy thousand pounds per annum, was a misfortune undreamed of in his philosophy.

When, therefore, he discovered that, instead of being able to reply to the "chaff" of Lord Algernon Rawdon and Lord Frederick Hill, by claiming their congratulations, as he expected, on the forthcoming alliance of the heiress of Lynchcombe with "his nephew, Lord Wilchester," he was reduced for a son-in-law to a St. James's-street Captain, over head and ears and commission in debt, he was as much disgusted as old Sir Harry Woolston had been, when he announced his own engagement to poor Maria.

"You deserve this affront, Netta," — said he, — "for an affront it is, for a girl with your prospects in life to be addressed by such a fellow as — as Captain Grandison. — Nothing will persuade me that you have

not encouraged him: — *you*, who have enjoyed such advantages in your introduction into society!"

"I assure you, Papa," she replied, rendered grave by his rebuke, "that, but for his brother's sake, who is a friend of my cousin Edgar, I should never have so much as danced with Captain Grandison. But in declining his proposals, we must be on our guard against letting him perceive how much lower you rate him than he rates himself. Such a man would attribute our disparagement to purse-pride; — an odious imputation, which we certainly do not deserve."

But Sir John was in no humour to be tutored. — His pride had received a staggering blow, and at an unlucky moment. — The city article in that morning's Times, was any thing but soothing. And the result was, that he stalked into his library and indited an answer to Grandison of Blandhurst's younger son, the terms and tone of which were calculated to shrivel him up into an Aztek.

To vindicate himself in the eyes of the world, under circumstances so ignominious, the *mangeur de cœurs* proceeded to forestal the rumour of his defeated hopes, by declaring that he had been shamefully "thrown over" by Miss Wraysbury; — and his set, and brother-officers, with an *esprit de corps* worthy of a better cause and greater hero, took part with him, and declared war against the heiress.

"What have you been about, my dearest Netta?"

cried Lady Dinton, when next she visited Piccadilly. "Monsieur de St. Marcel has just been telling us that you have written a letter to some man in the Guards, — (some *known* man, *bien entendu*, and belonging to our world,) — rejecting his hand in the high and mighty tone in which Queen Elisabeth repulsed the Duke of Anjou."

"I have written no letter, dear aunt. The known man was Berty Grandison's brother; and you are well aware that papa has always disliked and avoided his parents."

"No reason why you should make an enemy of the son. — Like the Knights of the Round Table, a young lady should be careful to salve the sword with which she inflicts a wound. — This man is already revenging himself, by declaring that you drew him on, only to refuse him."

"But every body knows to the contrary. Every body will acquit me. My cousin Edgar is perfectly aware that but for his intimacy with the elder brother, I should never have been even acquainted with Captain Grandison."

Lady Dinton took care not to notice audibly her niece's inference that "every body," and "cousin Edgar," were synonymous.

"You authorize me, at least," said she, "to deny, in a positive manner, that you ever wrote a line to *Captain* Grandison?"

"The most positive. — But would it not be wiser, dear aunt, to let the story drop, without further notice? — If Captain Grandison have really accused me, as you say, — (but I can scarcely believe that any English gentleman would be guilty of such falsehood!) — perhaps papa, — perhaps Edgar, — might hear the report, and think it necessary to make him retract. — Better allow the story to die away, and be forgotten."

At such generous self-abnegation, even Aunt Emma could not forbear imprinting a kiss on the cheek of her pretty niece; when, to her surprise, she found a tear stealing gently down.

"Say nothing of it, my dear child, to Theo.," said her ladyship. "She would be sure to tell her brother, on his return to town. — But I will give a hint on the subject to Mr. Howard; who, when he knows the rights of a case, manages to make the public see things in a proper light. — Let *him* only declare at the L*** House dinner to-day, that Captain Grandison has behaved unlike a gentleman, and this degraded swain of yours might as well have committed a forgery or marked a card."

CHAPTER XVII.

At the commencement of every new London season, next to the favourites for the Derby, Ascot Cup, and St. Leger, — the last imported *prima donna*, or *première danseuse*, — the animals which excite the strongest curiosity in the public mind, are usually the new members of her Majesty's parliament. — The Illustrated News renders us *un*familiar with their outward man, by a hazy portrait, after Claudet, in the same column with some monstrous fowl arrived by the last Oriental Steamer, — both occasionally deficient in an eye, claw, or whisker; — while some ponderous periodical produces an equally authentic biography; — correct in every thing but names, dates, and facts. — The following week comes forth, of course, a Notice from the editor, admitting that his "own correspondent" was at fault; having mistaken the new M. P. for an uncle of the same name, who died during the Irish Rebellion.

The idlers in Club-windows, meanwhile, gaping for news as other natives for air, are curious only to learn whether the new representatives of the people write themselves down L. or C.; and when the question has been worn as threadbare as the last divorce or

impending steeple-chase, in saunters Reuben Howard; and by a mere elevation of the eye-brows or an inward chuckle, settles the name, weight, and colours of the future Chatham, and nips his laurels in the bud, as completely as the "Fudge" of Burchell, or an epigram in Punch.

Through this trying sieve of public opinion, Lord Dinton, Sir John Wraysbury, and young Wilchester, had been lately winnowed. The first was unanimously set down as a piece of furniture, valuable only to the whip of his party. The second, in whose case his cook and his daughter were extenuating circumstances, was remanded till next assizes. But on Lord Wilchester, no man had mercy. He was young, handsome, distinguished in birth, fortune, and appearance; and above all, he bore a name which, by association, commanded universal esteem. It is a trying thing to succeed to a Sir Robert Peel, or to such a man as the affianced of poor Bessy; and instead of the time-honoured name bespeaking indulgence for him, he is judged as severely as Racine fils.

The gaping natives decided that the new Lord Wilchester had come forward too young; that he should have waited till his beard had sprouted, and he was able to count a hundred without prompting; while Reuben Howard, who, of course, regarded the son of his intimate friend with more than his usual share of malice, was heard to whisper one night in

the lobby of the House, that the poor boy would do well enough to second the address of the following session, unless spoiled, in the interim, by lollypops, toadies, and his mamma.

In such an establishment as the one in Piccadilly, the vultures were, of course, already gathered together. Like barnacles the dining-out men clung to the table of the prodigal Earl. All the little lively vermin of society busied themselves in fetching and carrying for the Countess and Lady Theodosia, and were rewarded by an occasional invitation. — By these, while the gorgeous album of Lady Theodosia was inscribed by their cramped hands with "occasional stanzas," well calculated to eclipse the celebrated "verses by a person of quality," Edgar was proclaimed a future Canning. Fortunately, the boy had at his ear the admonitory croak of Roger Farmer to remind him that he was mortal, and bid him "defy the foul fiend," Ambition. For Roger was of Molière's opinion, that —

> Plus on aime quelqu'un, moins il faut qu'on le flatte;
> A ne rien pardonner, le pur amour éclate.

"Just imagine that supercilious Mr. Howard telling mamma, by whom he sat yesterday at dinner, that if Edgar would apply himself seriously to study for the next six or eight years, reading only the leaders of the Times, the Premier Paris of the Debats, Knight's Almanack, the Peerage, the Almanach de Saxe Gotha,

and Tacitus, — he would probably turn out some day a man of the world, and a credit to the family," said Lady Theodosia, one night, to Berty Grandison, as he was providing her with a glass of ice at the buffet of the French embassy.

"Not half bad advice, either. But don't call him *that* Mr. Howard. You have now been nearly four months in London, Theo., and ought to have your 'Who's who,' at your fingers' ends. We can neither of us afford to create an enemy of Reuben Howard. For when I make poor Lord Dinton's hair stand on end by declaring our engagement, it is to old Reuben he will turn for advice, whether to smooth it down, as Jerome Cardan suggested to his patron the Archbishop, with an ivory comb; or whether to tear it up by the roots, like Kean in Sir Giles Overreach."

"In that case I will endeavour to be civil to him."

"Not for the value of his betting-book! He would set you down as a presuming little minx, for only presuming to address him. Reuben Howard looks upon young ladies as naturalists upon a chrysalis. He never noticed the Queen, till after her marriage. — But take care that he is invited to all your best dinner parties; and whenever he condescends to come, rise on his entrance, and make him as reverential a curtsey as to a Prince of the Blood."

The light-hearted girl promised any thing to please her dear Berty, or to modify the storm likely to arise;

when her parents came to know that she had promised to become Lady Theodosia Grandison. At present, the engagement was unannounced even to Miss Wraysbury. But Netta had long been prepared for the news; not by Theo. herself, but, in days of former confidence, by Edgar. It was, in fact, her knowledge of their mutual liking which had rendered her, to the dissatisfaction of her father, more familiar with the young attaché than with any of the young lords who were contending for her acquaintance; and it was therefore the more annoying to her, that since her rejection of his brother, some degree of misunderstanding had arisen between them. Not that Berty accused her of having flirted with the handsome Guardsman. But he was too fond of his brother, to side with the enemy.

By the Duchess of Groby, too, Janetta was subjected to a Chapone-ian discourse, stiffened with buckram and whalebone, on the subject of that unlucky proposal. "As her chaperon, — as one who had become responsible for her conduct to the world, her Grace thought it her duty to inform Miss Wraysbury how much she was lowered in the eyes of society by the addresses of a flirting, well-looking, dissipated, penniless young man." Whereupon poor Netta, though she cared very little just then about the eyes of society, and very little more about the dignified displeasure of the Duchess, from mere worry and

weakness of spirits, burst into tears; — a highly-gratifying circumstance to her Grace; who, attributing the pearly shower to her own eloquence, (though she had never before wrung a tear out of so much as a housemaid under rebuke,) fancied that all these years she must have been, after Monsieur Jourdain's fashion, a *Bossuet sans le savoir.*

"Come, come! Do not fret yourself unnecessarily, my dear Miss Wraysbury," said she. "In a season or two, all will probably be forgotten. My son Frederick informs me, I admit, that the business has been most unpleasantly canvassed at the clubs. But it cannot be helped now. And there *are* men, — Lord Harmondswyke for one, — who never set foot in a club."

Poor Netta might perhaps be of opinion that the clubs were no great losers by his absence. But the Duchess, who was on the eve of her departure for Northamptonshire, — the movements of the Grobys being as periodical as the changes of the moon announced per "Vox Stellarum," — condescended to express a wish to see her at the Abbey, shortly after her return to Harrals.

"Papa does not intend to visit Harrals this year," she replied, after suitable expressions of gratitude.

"Not visit Harrals? — Impossible! You must be in error, my dear. As Member for the County, he has no choice upon the subject."

"He will go there, probably, when the course of

business requires it. But the family will remain at Lynchcombe."

The Duchess shrugged her shoulders. — Why attempt to account for the vagaries of people with counting-house blood in their veins!

"I should have thought," was all she permitted herself to observe, "that with a sister settled at Molyneux Castle, the neighbourhood would acquire new interest for Sir John Wraysbury."

It was not for Janetta to represent to the wife of the Liberal Lord Lieutenant of North Hants that the maltreatment her father had received at his election, and the insults more recently offered, were something of a per contra. Still less could she venture to inform her grace that Harpsden the Puseyite officiating in his parish pulpit, was to Sir John Wraysbury as Mordecai, the Jew, sitting in the king's gate.

"But even though you do not settle at the family place this winter," resumed the Duchess, who had been arguing within herself that the heiress of seventy thousand a-year was not a little fish to be thrown back into the river, for that she might never be caught again, — "I trust, my dear, that Sir John will allow you to become my inmate for as long a time as the Abbey does not appear too dull to you? — I will write, and express to him how much it would gratify my family to have you among them."

A welcome intimation to Janetta, to whom, of late,

almost every one had seemed unkind; and her gratitude was too genuine not to be apparent.

"Or I will get my brother Reuben, who dines here to-day, to speak to him," added the Duchess; "for I have set my heart on showing you our old-fashioned household and habits."

Punctual to a moment, — for not a church-bell, or prompter's-bell, or saddling-bell was ever more correctly rung than the dressing-bell of Reuben Howard, arrived the Negociator General. But, being as great an economist of powder and shot as of time, he would not hear of taking aim at game so out of range as the heiress of Lynchcombe. — No false starts for Reuben.

"Why trouble yourself about this girl?" said he. "If 't is for Harmondswyke, take my word for it, he will never marry, — unless a Salamander, or one of Arnott's stoves. Fred. has other engagements: *his* book is made. — As to the younger ones, that circumspect father of hers would never be induced to pay their debts in exchange for a title of courtesy. — And think of having to drive a bargain with such a man as Wraysbury; and of the chance of being refused by that obscure vulgaritan. — Besides, he has at least thirty years' life in him: — the odds are too long."

And lo! the motion for Netta's visit to the Abbey was negatived without a division.

Another wound to the pride of the poor heiress, when she found that the Duchess of Groby had quitted town for the season, without fulfilling her promise. She had no further resource against a long autumn at Lynchcombe with Hilda and her mother; aggravated by the chance of encountering the indignant face of a Grandison every time she ventured beyond her gates!

CHAPTER XVIII.

While all this rumpling of the rose-leaf disturbed the luxurious couches of Carltonia, Denny Cross was thankfully enjoying its spring sunshine and summer shade. — Following the wisdom of Merck, that "it is better to try and elevate the positive, than attempt to realize the ideal," Hugh Pennington and his wife were extracting more happiness out of their old homestead than Sir John Woolston Wraysbury was ever likely to find in Lynchcombe and its demain.

For Hugh was a straight-forward man, who argued that every one had his day's duties allotted to him; and that he who fully performed them, did his best towards maintaining the order of the universe. — According to his practical views of life, the young must struggle, — the old must die; — and when summoned to Havermead by his sister, to lay their father's grey head in the grave, having fulfilled with dutiful respect the functions of chief mourner, he would have thought it an offence to the Almighty to pretend deep affliction for the closing of a life so unusually protracted: — more especially after just receiving dispatches from his Australian brothers, which announced that the young branches of the banyan tree had taken

root, and were becoming flourishing plants in their turn. — Instead of weeping over an event that had arrived in the fulness of time, he busied himself in the improvement of his farm, — an inheritance by so many descents, to be transmitted, he hoped, to remote inheritors of his race; — child or brother, — it scarcely mattered which.

He did not think too much of himself, or insist too strongly on his personal claims to enjoyment. He regretted the loss of Bessy; but Bessy had now a happier home. He regretted the loss of Lord Dinton; but Dinton had now a happier home. What obstacle was there then, to his satisfaction at finding his slippers aired for him by the fireside, — and his tea and newspaper waiting his return from seeing that "the sheep were in the fauld and the kye at hame;" — with a sunny face smiling at him from the opposite arm chair, and a cheery voice ready to say, "Yes, dear," to every stupid sentence that he uttered?

The new Mrs. Pennington, a chubby, good-humoured soul, who could have reckoned, off-hand, the number of chickens in her poultry yard, and of eggs daily produceable (bantams included,) saw things from the same simple point of view as her husband. Around *her* world, there existed no deceptious refractory atmosphere. The contented couple knew what they had to live upon, and how much good they might do and enjoy, without injury to the family already in pro-

spect, or the brothers who were always to find a home at Denny Cross. On such households, the wholesome sun delights to shine; leaving the tawdry finery of Belgravia, with all its fussy insignificance, its scandal-mongery fastidious impertinence, and unchristian dissensions, to be illuminated by gaslight, gleaming through smoke and fog.

If, for even the most notable housewives have their intervals of leisure, Mrs. Pennington occasionally indulged in fireside romances concerning her future progeny, it was scarcely to be wondered at. — Since, of the last brood of Penningtons reared in that homely coop, one had become the wife of the richest man in England, another of the cleverest, and the third, had she chosen, might have become a Countess, might not the future little Bessy, for whom she was at that moment imperilling her eyesight by embroidering strips of cambric, — be a second Lady Wraysbury, — mother to a new heiress of Lynchcombe?

She hoped not, — if a Sir John W. W. must be accepted as a portion of the bargain. The man whom she regarded as the murderer of Kit Bothamley, Ive Burdon, and the Earl of Dinton; and who, from the summit of his millions, looked down upon his sister's son, was an object of loathing to the Penningtons.

The new squire often congratulated himself that his brother-in-law had given the preference to his residence in Dorsetshire. "We shall learn something

each carefully avoided being alone with the other, no one would have discerned their mutual discontent. In presence of Sir John and his sister, every semblance of courtesy was kept up. For Miss Wraysbury could not be ungracious towards her poor relation; nor could Miss Wroughton rebuke, as she would fain have done, the cousin whose days she had robbed of half their sunshine.

At length, the last pine-apple of the last *déjeuner* of the London season had been cut and eaten; the last representation of the last opera, and even the National Anthem, which forms its grace after melody, had been performed with the "full strength of the company." — London was over. The lights were out. The green curtain was down. Parliament was prorogued in person by the Queen, in presence of a scanty remnant of the great world: the individuals composing which, looked nearly as yellow and withered as the shrivelled leaves beginning to lie in heaps in the causeways of Carlton Gardens. — All was sapless and sunless; and people departing for their country seats, and endeavouring to sum up the events of the season, grew peevish on discovering how little they had accomplished, either in public or private life. In the House, the majority of Bills was thrown out; — in their own, a still more grievous number sent in. Of daughters and dry goods unsaleable in the market, the less said the better. But not one among them

more disappointed than Sir John Wraysbury. He had made several unlucky hits in the money market, and in parliament, no hit at all. — Instead of the happy marriage he had anticipated as crowning with orange blossoms at St. George's church, his daughter and paternal cares like the blue and red lights, and genii floating in swings, that terminate an Easter piece, — the heiress of Lynchcombe was still unwedded. And what execution had she done? — Refused an insolent Captain, and a seedy foreigner! — All the trouble he had taken to screw up himself and his establishment to the level of his colossal fortune, had procured him only several bilious attacks, and a few invitations to great houses, where he found himself suddenly collapse into nothingness.

With these convictions gnawing into his side like the vulture of Prometheus, his journey from town, per Dorchester express-train, in a pre-engaged *coupé*, proved almost as oppressive as any he ever made from Temple Bar to Maple Hill, in the crowded Hendon bus, with a few shillings in his pocket.

But to traverse a fine open country in a breezy August day, the foliage in fullest exuberance, and the heather and dwarf-furze brightening even the cheerless heaths with their purple and gold, is a stirring change for a languid Londoner. By degrees, as they approached the sea, and the blue sky, gale-swept and pure, became more scantily flecked with dashes of

pearly cloud, the pure fresh air, untasted for so many months, dispelled the ill-humour and sadness of the millionary and his daughter. Mrs. Wroughton sat, as usual, absorbed in her knitting, and Hilda in her reflections; till, on traversing the New Forest, the lovely sylvan scenery of which was new to them, a burst of admiration escaped their lips. Both freely admitted that the forest glades of their favourite Odenwald were far exceeded by the richly wooded avenues through which they were gliding.

To Lynchcombe, where they speedily arrived, Miss Wraysbury was forced to welcome them as to a new home. But there, their exclamations ceased, overwhelmed by the grandeur of the place which weighed upon their spirits as the great Pyramid on the faculties of many a traveller. Right glad was Netta when Mrs. Dysart took them somewhat resentfully out of her hands, to exercise her privileges as cicerone; little suspecting, as she pointed out in the state dining room the youthful portrait of Elias Wraysbury, as "a shay doove by Sir Godfrey Knuller," that the pale lady in weeds, and tall beauty in iron grey, she was addressing, were indebted to that fatal picture for the loss of some hundreds of thousands of pounds.

A few bright days in the country served to restore Sir John and his daughter, if not exactly to the health and spirits they enjoyed previous to quitting Lynchcombe, twelve months before, — ere the head of the

one had been broken or the heart of the other, — to a happier frame of mind and body than is usually enjoyed among the strifes and envyings of London. Bitter, indeed, must have been the sorrows, or savage the resentments, that did not yield to the influence of the beautiful landscapes and luxuriant vegetation around them. — The most exquisite flowers were lavished on every side. In the park, sleek and glossy pets came running to be caressed by their young mistress; while rare and beautiful birds sidled fondly on their perches at the sound of her voice.

That little realm was fragrant and flowery as the gardens of Damascus. But Miss Wraysbury took care not to appeal on the present occasion to the sympathy of her cousin, and affected no fastidious care in the choice or adornment of her apartments. She would not a second time expose herself to be told that such trifles were beneath the attention of a well regulated mind. And the Teutonic maiden certainly justified her caution, by the listless air with which she wandered through the wondrous winter-garden, which united the products of the plains of Mexico with those of the summits of the Himalaya. Nothing that was rare seemed to take her fancy. Even the shrubberies, where newly-introduced exotics supplied the place of old-fashioned lilacs and laburnums, had no charms for Hilda.

One day, however, at breakfast, about a week

after their arrival at Lynchcombe, Miss Wroughton started suddenly from her seat, and, rushing to the open Elisabethan window, called the attention of the little party to one of those magical sunbursts which the skyey influences of a littoral district occasionally originate.

"How wise of you, uncle," said she, after having persuaded Sir John to hurry through his coffee in order to participate in the sight, "to establish your residence in this beautiful spot, instead of in that monotonous Northamptonshire."

"Hush, hush, my dearest Hilda! — You forget that you are affecting to disparage our native county," said her mother, who had now joined the group.

"I cannot help it, Mamma. — I hardly know which I most dislike, its scenery or its climate. And surely my uncle has made proof of sharing my antipathy, by creating this princely place within view of the sea, instead of among those tame pastures and dreary woodlands."

Praise of Lynchcombe was always acceptable to Sir John; and though by no means certain that Hilda Wroughton had any right to entertain opinions of any kind, — not on account of her age and sex, but because of the limited amount of three per cent. consols she was ever likely to inherit, — he smiled upon her approvingly, asked her whether she were fond of

riding, and stated that one of Harry's hacks, which was warranted to carry a lady, was at her service.

His daughter was amazed; six months before, how overjoyed would she have been to see him bestow half so much kindness on his friendless niece!

"We must not, however, think of riding just at present," he added, while they still stood admiring the atmospheric changes that converted the landscape before them into an animated diorama. "Such weather as this affords us a pleasanter resource. I have a surprise for you, Netta. You used to envy the Grandisons their yacht. A nutshell, called the 'Alga,' is moored off my farm yonder at Westcove, in which I think we might venture a sail this morning, without much fear of shipwreck."

The very thing Netta had been longing for ever since she could remember. A mere wherry had hitherto bounded her experience of maritime venture; in which, when Harry and his tutor could obtain the sanction of Miss Avesford, (who, on such occasions, always took care to anchor herself at home in a heavy chapter of the History of the Lower Empire,) she had occasionally enjoyed a sail for an hour or two: always *in* shore and never unless the state of the weather insured being becalmed the greater portion of her leave of absence.

But on hearing that the Alga, which the millionary, in a vulgar spirit of deprecation, chose to call a nutshell, was a model schooner of eighty tons, the word

cruise seemed no longer fabulous. — Instead of looking forward to the Needles as the boundary of her voyage, she began to dream of Cherbourg and the Channel Islands.

"Why, oh! why, dear Papa, did you not allow Harry to spend his Midsummer holidays here, instead of dispatching him and his tutor to the Highlands?" she inquired. For though admitting that her brother would be better and happier engaged in salmon-fishing than by parading his hobbledehoyhood in the stagnant atmosphere of Hyde Park, she could not but fancy that Westcove and the Alga would have been a pleasanter alternative than Loch Fyne.

"Inman proved faithless to his contract; and it is scarcely a week since the boat was declared seaworthy," was all that Sir John chose to reply. For, like his sister Emma and the Muscovite cabinet, he seldom allowed his policy to appear in public, without veil or vizard; and did not choose to admit that he never intended Harry, either as boy or man, to brandish even a temporary sceptre at Lynchcombe.

The wind being favourable, a signal was given from the flagstaff at the extremity of the terrace; and for once, the skies seemed to owe no grudge to a pleasure party. The barouche was soon at the door to convey them to Westcove, whither a cart had been already dispatched full of the creature-comforts with which Englishmen are never expected to dispense,

except amidst the fatigues of a severe campaign in an unwholesome climate. — But as they were about to get into the carriage, Netta remonstrated against the unsealike costume of her cousin.

"You will be very uncomfortable," said she. — "Better try one of my waterproof cloaks and a wide-awake."

"I am only accompanying you as far as Westcove, to admire the Alga and see you embark," replied she. "I shall return home with the carriage."

"But my sister told me just now, she did not at all want you," remonstrated Sir John. "During our absence, she will amuse herself very well with her knitting."

"But I should amuse myself very ill by a sail, uncle," rejoined the blunt Hilda.

"How are you to know, till you have tried?" argued Sir John, as they bowled lightly along his beautiful domain.

"Because wiser people than myself, such as Dr. Johnson and my cousin Theodosia, have decided a yacht to be a prison, with the addition of imminent danger."

"Your cousin Theodosia!" ejaculated Sir John, impatiently. "Where should *she* have learned any thing about yachting?"

["In a voyage to Naples, during her childhood, which she still remembers with horror; and we came

to a conclusion together, we, whose life has been spent in exile, that Providence certainly signified its will that people should abide in their native country, by imposing the torment of sea-sickness to curb our roving propensities. All other human sufferings have been mitigated by the progress of science: — *that* will never be remedied."

"It is overcome by habit."

"Only by those who are compelled to make ship-board a profession. The seeker after novel scenery and new sensations, remains a victim."

"You consider then, that as the black skins of the Nubians, or the brown of the Hindoos, mark them out as the appropriate inhabitants of certain climates," he persisted "we English ought to adhere to our native island, like crocodiles to the Nile?"

Neither jest nor reproof had power to change the opinions of Hilda Wroughton; — still less her resolves; and she had made up her mind not to set foot on the deck of the Alga — But when they wound down the sinuous road to the pleasant little creek, lying under those chalky cliffs, she did not conceal her enthusiastic admiration of the tranquil beauty of the scene; for though she cared nothing for conservatories or flower-beds, a fine landscape lighted up her heart and face into a glow. — An inland life had not accustomed her to those exquisite specimens of coast-scenery to which English eyes are familiar. There was a charm

in the very sight of the sea: — that monster at bay, beautiful and treacherous as a sleeping leopard, ready on the smallest provocation to rise, and rage, and devour.

The little Alga, riding on the deep blue waters at the foot of those precipitous cliffs, was already getting up her sails; while, only a few yards above high water-mark, embedded in the hill side, and surrounded by shrubberies of tamarisk and rosemary, rose a quaint cottage, built by the Latimers, and as yet undemolished by the improving hand of the fastidious millionary. — Tangles of the horned poppy with its glaucous foliage and bright yellow blossoms, overgrowing the path from the garden gate to the shore, proved that it was less resorted to as a bathing-house by the present owners, than by their predecessors.

"What a snug little nook, — what a charming, charming view!" — cried Hilda; "so mild, and so pure, though close to the refinements of Lynchcombe. Next time you attempt a sail, uncle, mamma must come and spend here the time of your absence. She would so enjoy these cool waves, plashing against the sunny shore."

Sir John cared little about the matter. In fact he seldom listened to, and still rarely answered his niece's flights of fancy. At that moment he was busy placing Netta carefully in the boat; — the trim crew of which

bore, inscribed on their habiliments, the name of the "Alga." A few strokes of their oars conveyed the self-complacent baronet to the charming little schooner, that was to create a new home and new phase of existence for the heiress of Lynchcombe.

CHAPTER XIX.

Once afloat, even in the domestic waters of the Solent, captains of yachts become arbitrary characters. The owner of the craft is, by comparison, a cypher. — Like head-nurses and head-coachmen, they arrogate a right of proprietorship over the objects entrusted to their hands; besides the privilege of making themselves generally disagreeable.

Joseph Rees, the master of the Alga, was no exception; nay, there was a muffish cut about the millionary, which doubled the seaman's airs of superiority. After inquiring, with much respect, whether Sir John would "please to take the helm," justly surmising that he would as soon handle the claw of a live lobster, he indulged in sundry criticisms upon the Alga and its rigging; adding, at every fresh disparagement, that Mr. Inman might have asked *his* advice, — as he might be supposed to know something about the sea, which had been his calling, man and boy, for the last five-and-thirty years. — He next began discussing the only other yacht connected with that portion of the Dorsetshire coast, *i. e.*, the rough-and-ready Yarico, of Blandhurst. Bearing the flag of no yacht club, affecting no uniform for its men beyond Guernsey shirts and pea-jackets, the little sturdy sea-boat was as little

to be compared with the fast schooner in which, at that moment, they "chas'd the whistling brine," as the Hendon bus with the over-varnished brougham and fine stepper of Sir John, of which it was such hard work to get ready for action. — But the moment Joseph Rees perceived that praise of Squire Grandison and his cutter was disagreeable to his owner, he pursued the advantage; just as any other dependent would have fallen into a contrary extreme.

"Bless you, Sir, Squire Grandison 's a gentleman as cares no more for weather, than nothen at all. — Show me the gale as 'ud fright Squire Grandison off the water. To be sure, *his* vessel's one as the best or wust o' seamen might embark in, if their families was ever so little purvided for. — But the squire's a regular trump, and no mistake."

Sir John put up his glass, *not* towards the horizon, but for a spy at his own carriage, winding slowly up the cliff on its return to Lynchcombe. But Joe Rees was not to be cut short in the Grandison chapter.

"When our men was a taking in water, at the Cliff spring, early this morning, Sir John," he resumed, "two of the Yarico's crew was there on the same herrand; who said as the old squire was talking of a long cruise, — in the North Sea, they thought, — to get out o' hail o' home; being vexed out of his wits about this marriage o' one o' the young gen'lem'n."

This unwitting allusion to the grand humiliation of

Sir John Wraysbury's season and session, was almost as painful a blow to him as the one inflicted by the fragment of granite at his election of the preceding year; — and down he went into the luxurious cabin, to sulk over the newspapers he had brought in his pocket; — leaving Netta to luxuriate alone in the delicious pungency of the atmosphere, as, at ten-knot speed, they stood out towards Portland; — sensible of no greater motion than is felt in a well-driven sledge, or well-skaited figure of eight.

A pleasant hour ensued; soothing, tranquil, silent; — except when interrupted by the occasional flapping of a sail, or scream of a passing gull. — The white cliffs became dimmer and dimmer; but, as usual, just as their enjoyment was at its utmost, Joe Rees, who greatly preferred eating his dinner at the moorings in West cove, to minding his business on deck, discovered that, unless they tacked to return, the tide would not serve them to land till late in the evening.

Shoreward, therefore, they went; the state of the wind necessitating a long series of tacks, to take them back to the starting point; and by the time they reached it, a little dizzy, and exceedingly weary, Netta was beginning to be in greater conceit with *terra firma*. Alas, the gloss of novelty was already worn from the new toy!

On arriving at home, though they were welcomed by Helmsley and Co. with smiles of surprise, as though

they had expected that of the "bones" of Sir John, (as of those of Prince Ferdinand's father,) "coral" would have been "made," and that the pretty yachting dress of Miss Wraysbury might perhaps terminate ere the day was done in the tail of a mermaid, Mrs. Wroughton did not let them off so easily. She lay in wait for them in the vestibule, with a budget of news; which she poured out, as a child does fruit out of a basket, topsy-turvy, spoiling it by crush and compression. For, lo! the second post had arrived while the Alga was contending with wind and tide; and for once, she had dropped her knitting-needles.

"To think that we should have a wedding in the family, this year, after all, my dear John!" said she. "Hilda will have it that we must all have foreseen it long ago. — But I 'm sure *I* never heard a word about the matter."

Already qualmish, Sir John turned exceedingly sick: for his intractable nephew presented himself at once to his imagination, as the intended bridegroom. — But with a woman's surer instinct, Janetta started forward, clapping her hands.

"Theodosia and Berty Grandison, I am certain," said she. — "How glad I am! — Now, at least, I am sure of a pleasant neighbour at Lynchcombe."

The ancient mariner of the Alga looked Sou' westers at her; that she should allude thus explicitly to Lynchcombe as her own, and that the neighbourhood she

prospectively rejoiced in, should be that of Blandhurst!

"What is all this?" — said he, sinking into one of the magnificent carved oaken chairs that graced the vestibule, and would not have been out of place in the Coronation Hall of the German Empire, in the Römer.

"Only, as Netta has just guessed, that Berty Grandison is going to be married immediately to your niece Theodosia."

"To Lady Theodosia Molyneux? — And the Dintons consent?" —

"Sorely against the grain, I'm afraid; though for my part, I can't think what they expected for Theo. — When Albert Grandison was appointed paid *attaché* at Frankfort, Emma gave him a letter of introduction to us, expressly stating that he was the son of an English gentleman of ancient family and large estate."

The magnate of Lynchcombe smiled superciliously at hearing Blandhurst thus called out of its name. But he knew that, except in crochet-stitches, poor Clara was not a ready reckoner.

"How long has all this been settled, Aunt Wroughton?" inquired Netta, more interested in any other branch of the business than the financial.

"Three or four days, my dear; — just as the family were leaving town. Emma did not choose to

write immediately, hoping some obstacle might occur to break off the match. — But to her great disappointment, Mr. Grandison's father has come forward in the most liberal manner."

"He probably did not care to have another son a discarded suitor," observed Sir John, infusing a degree of scorn into his voice and look, that would have made the fortune of a provincial Coriolanus.

"One can't be expected to fathom his motives. — But it seems that he is to raise Berty's allowance from five to eight hundred a-year, on condition that he goes off immediately after the marriage to his *attachéship*, without bringing his bride to Blandhurst, — (not very civil, by the way, to poor Theo.) And as this, with Berty's salary, insures him twelve hundred a-year, and the entailed estate in perspective, and the Dintons give five-and-twenty thousand to Theodosia, in addition to the miserable eight thousand three hundred, her mother's fortune, settled upon her as representing the younger children, the young couple will start with two thousand a a-year, and a profession; besides, as Emma justly remarks, two hospitable country-houses always open to them."

"Lucky that she did not say *three!*" thought Sir John; who was half tempted to repeat what he had heard from Joseph Rees, concerning the inhospitable projects of Mr. Grandison.

"The fact is," rejoined Mrs. Wroughton, slowly

proceeding upstairs by the side of her brother, — for the dressing-gong had sounded, and Netta was already off to question her cousin Hilda, — "the fact is, that, but for the death of poor Lord Dinton, nothing of this could have come to pass. — There would have been no twenty thousand pounds for Theo. — It is only her accession of fortune that enables her to make so bad a match."

A pleasant hearing for Sir John! — If young ladies of fortune were entitled to marry beggars, what was to be the ultimate fate of the heiress of Lynchcombe? —

At dinner, he was in his glummest mood; which Hilda secretly attributed to the physical effects of the sea. — For in her cousin's marriage she saw nothing to disapprove. — The bride and bridegroom were admirably matched; and believing that, as Shenstone asserts, "the lightest kinds of wood become the most solidly glued together," she doubted not that the union of two weak people would create additional strength.

"I wonder," she observed to her mother, when they discussed the matter after dinner with Miss Wraysbury, "what pretext Aunt Emma well could find for inviting my uncle and Janetta to the wedding, and leaving us out?" —

Mrs. Wroughton replied by a glance at her widow's weeds. The excuse was already found. But Hilda's

mourning was now nominal; and nothing could be easier than for *her* to accompany the Wraysburys into Northamptonshire.

"No fear of an invitation to any of us," interposed Janetta; attributing her cousin's surmises to anxiety for an opportunity of visiting Molyneux Castle. — "The terms on which it is my father's pleasure to stand with the Blandhurst family, render it very unlikely we should be asked. Captain Grandison too, whom it is impossible for us to meet, will doubtless officiate as his brother's groom's man."

"Poor Berty Grandison!" ejaculated the dark-haired beauty; "I should have thought Edgar would be his *garçon d'honneur.*"

Netta glanced at her for a moment: — then cast down her eyes; abashed by such utter want of delicacy. To her, it would have been impossible to cite the name of Edgar in this careless manner. It was laying a sacrilegious hand upon the ark.

"Mr. Grandison appears to have been more generous than gracious about this marriage," said she, after a pause, fearing that her confusion might be apparent. —

"He is perhaps one of those who, like Voltaire's English merchant, '*Fait donner, mais ne sait pas vivre,*' observed Hilda; and poor Netta took it into her head that the words contained a sarcasm addressed to herself. "But though he may absent himself from the wedding,"

she resumed, lest her rising colour should intimate how much she was hurt, "Maud and Jane, and their mother, will, of course, attend."

"Fortunate for us, that we are so far from the seat of war," said Hilda, contemptuously; "for Berty's raptures and Theodosia's flightiness, would have been a sad infliction."

"I was always fond of Berty," replied Netta, naively. "Berty is a very different person from his brother at Blandhurst; in spite of the coolness between the families, he always contrives to be kind and serviceable to Harry." A plausible pretext for her partiality to Lord Wilchester's bosom friend.

Their further interest in the match was demonstrated, on the part of Netta, in an affectionate letter of congratulation to the cousin who seemed too happy to foresee her sympathy in the event; on that of Mrs. Wroughton, in laying the foundation of a lambs' wool shawl, heavy enough to form a blanket for the most rheumatic old woman in the parish. But Hilda stirred not a finger. Between herself and her cousin there had never been the smallest regard; and Lady Dinton's warning to her sister Clara concerning Lord Wilchester, had steeled her proud heart against them all.

Some days elapsed before Sir John found a leisure day among the few that remained of the yachting season; and Joseph Rees made his appearance daily at the Hall, to state that the wind was fair for Guernsey or

the Channel Islands, without seducing the new M.P. from a library table covered with files of letters, pamphlets, blue-books, and other lumber created by the malice of civilisation to obstruct our view of the clear blue sky and bright green earth, by pages "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," or of figures which none but the American calculating boy, or the private secretary of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ever crammed into his memory, useless even to *them*, as to a magpie its hoard of stolen silver.

One soft breezy morning, however, having reason to apprehend a visit from a brother member on a visit in his neighbourhood, and who, he suspected, of wanting to inveigle him into a share in a Welsh slate quarry, which was nowhere in the market, he sent a message to his daughter to be at Westcove in an hour, and made up his mind to undergo the delights of another sail.

Had Miss Wraysbury been aware of his state of mind, nothing but a sense of filial duty, nearly as strong as Aunt Bessy's, would have prevented her pleading some sort of indisposition as a pretext for keeping house. But with her usual submissiveness, on went the simple yachting dress of raw silk, and Pamela hat of brown straw; and at the appointed moment she was ready to step into the boat. They were bound to the Freshwater caves; and Joseph Rees informed them that he had prepared tackle both for

deep water fishing and shallow, — in case the wind should go down.

To the state of the wind Sir John was indifferent. He liked to be afloat, because it detached him from his fellow-creatures, who, he was beginning to find, cared only for the contents of his pocket, regarding him as a very little man annexed to a very large fortune. And to alter their opinions by "doughty deeds" or acts of kindness, was a Herculean labour from which he considered the proprietor of several thousands a-year wholly exempt.

The millionary was, in fact, in a humour most misanthropic: — Lucullus in a fit of indigestion, or Achilles of the pouts, could scarcely be more splenetic. For, as the Dutch king who escaped the batteries of the Boyne fell at length the victim of a molehill, the great capitalist of Lynchcombe and Harrals considered himself a disgraced man by being blackballed at the R. Y. C.

Like all unsuccessful candidates, no matter for what office or distinction, he threw the blame upon false friends. Lord Algernon Rawdon, and half-a-dozen other Right Honourables, who cared no more whether he succeeded or not, than who was to be the successor to Calcraft, had assured him, had almost compelled him, to have his name proposed; — yet he had been pilled without mercy. Unwilling to admit his own want of popularity, he decided that Jem

Grandison was at the bottom of it. — Because Jem happened to be at Cowes, — the place where just then the greatest amount of champagne was to be drunk at other people's expense, — he did not doubt that the resentful Guardsman had got up a faction against him.

Endeavouring to forget the secretary's unsatisfactory letter of announcement, still in his pocket, Sir John addressed himself — not to the society of his daughter, — who was being victimized by the intrusive egotism of Joe Rees, but to a bundle of pamphlets, just received from town. — For though it was part of his business as a millionary, as it is part of Panizzi's at the Museum, to open his library doors to all the folios and quartos published, to carry on through the lapse of ages the stultification of mankind, it was only for the "stitched" fly-leaves of temporary interest, that he ever condescended to put on his spectacles.

The present allotment of "paper pellets of the brain," treated, as usual, of "Criminal Law," and "Poor Law," (qy., Poor Criminal Law, and Criminal Poor Law?) — "A Voice from the Colonies," — "A Voice from the Gold Regions," — and divers other "airy tongues that syllable men's names," and too often miscall them.

One, printed at Glasgow, on villanous paper, in old-fashioned type, "On the Centralization of Rail-

roads," for a moment attracted his attention; for there was a practical look about it, promising information that might be the means of adding a few hundreds to his millions. — But the cream-laid, new-laid, product of a Piccadilly Eccaleobion, came next to hand, — "A Shot at the Game Laws," by a Double-Barrel, — which it was not in the heart of a poacher-slaying Northamptonshire baronet to resist.

Slouched into his comfortable yacht-lounge, his legs crossed, and his sou'-wester drawn over his eyes, — cutting at express pace through the translucent waters, and fanned by balmy gusts of a golden August day, he prepared to do mental battle with some landless sportsman, — whose chief acquaintance with game lay in its connexion with bread sauce, fried crumbs, or currant jelly.

Though the faculties which induced even the clear-headed Roger Farmer to predict for John Woolston, when a working barrister, the highest honours of his profession had been considerably obfuscated since his entrance into the kingdom of Mammon, — (for what substance more unelastic than gold, to fill up the interstices of brain or heart?) — Sir John decided by a glance at the explosion of verbosity contained in the opening page, that a Double-Barrel was A double s. Every argument in use, from the deerstalking of William Rufus to that of the Duke of Athol, was served up in succession, like Andrew Marvell's shoulder of

mutton, — first hot, then cold, then hashed. The 13th act of Richard II., cap. 13, and 6th of George I., cap. 16, were judiciously quoted in connexion with the protection of pheasants; rare at the former period as birds of Paradise, and even at the latter, kept in aviaries.

But still, Sir John read on; — for in turning over the pages, his eye had caught the words, "Statute of Northampton," to which stringent act of our wise Edward, county magistrates are apt to take off their hats.

But how little was he prepared to find a Baronet of Northampton divide the honours with the Statute! — There he was, in black and white, — as clearly defined, as though a double W. were affixed to the picture! — The whole story of Kit Bothamley and Ned Burdon, indited in the clearest letter press! — It was proved to him that, by the ancient laws of King Athelstan, Bothamley of Ash Bank was compelled to "domicile to folk-right" his landless and lordless brother, and make "bot for him to the folkmote." And it was proved to him in white and very black, that he had oppressed his tenant and done to death his tenant's boy-brother, for the sake of a little quadruped, whereof, during the last shooting season, three thousand four hundred and thirty had been killed on his estates.

About as pleasant reading as the old coal-bill! —

No wonder that he flung it overboard in a rage. — But even there, his puny arm was no match for the winds of Heaven, and the buoyancy of the waters of the Channel. The accusing pamphlet floated unsubmergically; following in the lee of the Alga, like the albatross in the ballad.

Janetta had a pleasant time of it for the remainder of their sail! As to the garrulous captain, he confided to his mate, that night, over a stiffish glass of something consolatory, that "he didn't mean to say nothen agen Sir John. But to his thinkin', he warn't much of a gen'lemn. He, Joe Rees, had sailed with a many gents, and some lords; and it wor the first time, and should be the last, he'd ever have his nose snubbed off his face."

For he had been so unlucky as to disturb the Northampton Baronet's rumination on the pamphlet, which still kept starting up at intervals from the waters, like the accusing corpse of Carraccioli. — Sir John having taken it into his head, that this overlearned production emanated from the pen of his nephew Olave. It certified local facts, known only in the parish of Harrals; and who but the Harpsdens would care to enumerate his hares, or grieve over the grave of a Kit Bothamley.

He did but muddle his brains by these troubled reflections; whereas the practised eye of a Reuben Howard would have looked through the subject at a

glance; and dividing, after the fashion of a rule of three, the name of the publisher by the title and style of the squib, have found the author's name in the quotient.

In haste, Sir John Wraysbury said much the same as King Solomon, concerning the veracity of mankind. But it seemed hard, after so much waste of claret and champagne, — of turtle and venison, — that he had not secured a friend to whom, in any emergency, to turn for counsel or comfort. — If a second windfall of millions were to fall upon his head, it would find him almost more heart-touchy than in his Temple Chambers. — For though dear Maria was represented by the most devoted of daughters, the fidgety clerk had an unsatisfactory successor in Helmsley, the cockney groom of the Chambers; who would give warning at a second's notice, to a master whom he regarded as a snob, if bespoken by Lord Marington or the Duke of Groby; or beckoned to, from Newcastle to the Land's End, by the Honourable Reuben Howard. —

As to the parliamentary distinctions to which, when a pains-taken Rugby scholar, he had looked forward as a callow Cæsar to his laurels, they might, perhaps, have crowned the thoughts, sentiments, and feelings which would have taken a seat with him for Wadhurst, fourteen years before. But cooped eaglets dwindle into the feebleness of sparrows. His lofty aspirations, like ill-planted pine-trees, had lost their

leader and become abortive. No more chance of his engendering a valuable reform, or appearing in the great letters, (unless to be shown up for some local blunder, as a magistrate,) than of recovering the Barony of Fitz-Alwyne. Perhaps this very Double-barrel might be keeping back a shot or two for one of the three leaders of the Times.

Joe Rees, perceiving that his patron was in one of his worst of tempers, — and old Sir Harry was beginning to break out in Sir John as manifestly as when, in due season, the sapling oak bears acorns, seized his opportunity to inquire whether his honour and the young lady would "please to sleep aboard, or at the Hotel at Freshwater; as if neither place suited, 't would be best to tack at once, for shore. The wind had sprung up a point to nor'ard, and the weather-eye looked ugly." And it was by no means disagreeable to either party, to find, after an hour's zigzagging on the great blue plain which, whatever the weather-eye might look, looked any thing but "ugly," that the tall cliffs became gradually more clearly defined in the distance; — like a painter's composition growing into life on the canvas.

It was all the more pleasant, indeed, to Sir John, because the combination of wind and tide was carrying off the atrocious pamphlet in the direction of Rio Janeiro; and he accordingly fell into a doze, uneasy perhaps, but the best that his yacht-lounge and con-

science would allow; while poor Netta was left to amuse herself with the glass, which she used and abused to any extent, as a defence against the constant intrusion of the presuming Joe.

The spy-glass of a millionary, albeit to his name were appended the letters L.S.D. in lieu of the R.Y.C. he coveted, was, of course, of first-rate quality. — With its aid, a deerstalker might have swept the country for forty miles round; or, an admiral at the Baltic, discerned that a vote of censure was awaiting him in the House of Commons. It enabled Netta to perceive, almost before Westcove and its cottage became even slightly visible to the naked eye, that a female, decidedly not the keeper's rotund wife, was leaning over the garden gate; — engaged in conversation with a male figure, decidedly not that of the podgy keeper. — She looked again, — looked hard, looked anxiously; and felt a little angry with the spray produced by the flow of the tide, for obscuring her view. — For it was quite apparent that the persons awaiting them were not only man and woman, — but lady and gentleman. Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Farmer might have suddenly quitted Havermead, bringing dear Constance to enjoy the last of the summer bathing. —

But no! that noble-looking man bore no resemblance to the still uncouth, though drooping form of the old Q.C.: — least of all, when, drawing closer towards

his companion, he held her a moment, fast embraced: — then, darted up the road, and was out of sight in a moment!

The fair companion by whom he was watched as long as watching was to any purpose, passed her handkerchief over the eyes which could see him no longer; while Netta, now breathless from agitation, and whose eye-sight was becoming dimmed by somewhat more than the sea-spray, had no longer any excuse for misdoubting the identity of Hilda Wroughton.

The strange visitor could be consequently none other than Edgar; — Edgar being concealed in the neighbourhood; — probably at Blandhurst, — a spot with which he had long been connected by friendship, and was about to be by closer ties: — enjoying furtive interviews with his affianced wife, till their troth-plight was reluctantly sanctioned by his family! —

No wonder, that so sore a pain smote the poor seafaring heiress somewhere about the region of the heart. — What a desolate creature did she feel, at that moment; — not more alone on the seething ocean, without a sail in sight, than on the ungenial earth.

As in most houses, where yachting is the prevailing epidemic, dinner was just then, at Lynchcombe, a moveable feast: — served at any hour between seven and eleven, that suited wind and tide, and Joseph Rees. The consequence was, that the fillets of soles

were occasionally fried to the hue of mahogany, and the venison roasted to that of ebony; while to the caul flowers described in the *même* as *choufleurs glacés*, the name of choufleurs *à la glace* might have been far more aptly applied.

Now Sir John, though no epicure, — (it was not in him to deal tenderly, even with his appetite), hated to behold the ruin of a good dinner; and on the day in question, the overboiled turbot that looked like one of his favourite parchments stewed over a slow fire, caused his own sparks to fly upward. Mrs. Wroughton's face, so much was she in awe of his humour, always bore a proportionate elongation to that of his own visage; — while Netta, without so much as noticing the unsightly fish or unbenign relatives, had enough to do to keep the tears out of her eyes.

It became consequently the more remarkable that Hilda's looks and voice were joyous as June. Her cheeks, usually so pale, were glowing with happiness; her lips, usually so silent, rivalled that day the lightsomeness of spirit of her happier cousin. What could have befallen her? — What charm was upon her nature? — What forced her youthful beauty into sudden bloom, like a budding rose-tree in the sunshine? — Alas! none but the heartbroken Netta could have answered, that

"Love who leaves where'er he lights,
A chill'd or burning heart behind,"

had recently left in the heart of Hilda Wroughton the seal of his potent presence.

It was not altogether pleasant to poor Netta to be cross-questioned by this triumphant cousin concerning her morning's cruise; how many whiting-pout they had captured, and how many yachts they had hailed off the Needles. For there was such a ring of glee in the sound of her voice, as caused the tones of Miss Wraysbury's, when heard in reply, to resemble, by comparison, a desponding penitent's whisper in a confessional.

At length, the radiant streams from the eyes of Hilda, and the unusual flush that coloured her cheek, *almost* woke a feeling of envy in the gentlest of human hearts; and Netta was on the point of inquiring how and where she had spent the time of their absence, and whether, at a second visit, the quietude of West Cove had fascinated her as much as on a first acquaintance. But she forbore. And Sir John, who had reasons of his own for not wishing his taciturnity to be noticed, huskily shook off his fit of the sullens, and began to talk his heaviest: which, when he condescended to do, the family circle was expected to restrict itself to occasional bows, like the well-poised head of a mandarin.

After an exordium upon the advantages of centralisation, (the heads of which were pillaged from an obsolete Westminster Review), more particularly of

dynastic centralisation, as exemplified in the Bourbon and Bonaparte families in royal, and others of nepotic disrepute in official life, he began explaining to his sister that the Wiltshire Woolstons had been making friendly advances to him.

"I forgot to tell you, Clara," said he, "that the other day, at the yeomanry dinner at Salisbury, Philip Woolston came up and introduced himself to me; saying, that as we resided in adjacent counties, it would afford his family the sincerest pleasure to live on neighbourly terms with mine; adding, that delicacy had prevented his coming forward with extended hands so long as my abandonment of Harrals proved that the entail of the property had some weight with me —"

"Not a very courteous allusion, surely?" interrupted Mrs. Wroughton.

"Hear me to an end, my dear Clara. But now," he added, "that I possessed a fine young son to secure the family estates, — a son of whom he heard the highest character at Eton, both from his own boys and their masters, — he trusted I should look upon him only as a cousin most anxious to become a friend."

"Very kindly felt!" exclaimed Janetta.

"Very handsomely expressed!" added Mrs. Wroughton, already prepared to knit her courteous kinsman a comforter or a pair of muffaters.

"I have therefore made up my mind," resumed Sir John, "to ask them here in September. One can't

have a party staying in the house, so long as there is nothing but a billiard table to amuse them. But when partridge-shooting begins, we will gather around us the whole Woolston clan."

"You will not, I fear, be able to get Emma," observed Mrs. Wroughton, who seldom made a remark that was not ill-timed. "It will be just about the time of her daughter's wedding."

"I did not dream of inviting her. Emma has become too great a lady to remember that she ever bore our name. I should give Edgar the chance of showing that he is not ashamed of his relations; but that I hear he is going abroad. The Duchess of Groby wrote me word, the other day, that Lord Harmondswyke was to winter at Madeira; and that my nephew thought of bearing him company."

Involuntarily, poor Netta raised her mournful hazel eyes towards her cousin, much as those of the lovely Lady Christabel were turned upon the lofty Lady Geraldine, to inquire what amount of information she would deign to afford the family, on this interesting subject. But Hilda met her gaze with the calmest unconcern: — made no sign, and no explanation. Had the individual under discussion been Lord Algernon Rawdon or Lord Frederick Hill, she could not have gone on eating her over-roasted grouse with a better appetite.

Partly to conceal her own confusion of thought

and countenance, Netta now turned towards her father, with a few inquiries touching these Wiltshire Woolstons. — "Were there many daughters? — many sons? — Was it likely they should find the family an addition to their acquaintance?" —

Sir John replied according to his usual code, that "Philip Woolston possessed something about four thousand a-year, landed property, at Wormley, in North Wiltshire; and a large family, of which he knew only that there was a son or two at Eton. He had, however, been presented, at Salisbury, to a dowdy Mrs. Woolston. He was afraid there were several daughters."

"Surely, Papa," said Netta, "as you were kind enough to promise me, in London, that, when settled here, out of the way of Harrals and the Rectory, you would show some little kindness to my cousin Olave, it would be a good opportunity to invite him with the family to which he belongs." — It is impossible to see a more gentlemanly young man; and the honours he has attained at the University, clearly prove him to be a most gifted one. Pray, dear papa, for *my* sake, do so much kinduess to the son of poor Aunt Carry!"

Mrs. Wroughton trembled at the audacity of her niece. She was astonished, when, instead of being punched by such a torrent of remonstrance as would have fallen on her own head at such a proposal, the presuming girl received no severer rebuke than, —

"We will see about it, my dear. At Harrals, it would have been impossible. Nothing could suit me less than to have this young man, scholar or no scholar, idling about my house. And to ask him with Philip Woolston and his family, would bring too many strangers into the house at once. But some day or other, since you have it so much at heart, I shall be happy to see Olave Harpsden at Lynchcombe."

CHAPTER XX.

By what augury, derived from flight of birds, or howl of hounds, or the equally unreliable presentiments of the human heart, is the best regulated family to prognosticate its destiny from one half-year's end to the other? While scarcely a myopic newsmonger but pretends to "see as from a tower the end of all," and quotes empires, kingdoms, and grand-duchies, rising and falling in the European market, — the most sapient of mortals, — Reuben Howard himself, with his camera-obscura of a head reflecting in one focus the four quarters of the globe, — ought to hesitate about predicting what, in his next neighbour's house, the morrow may bring forth.

Twelve months before, the prospect of a happy wedding had cheered the sadness of Molyneux Castle, then mourning for the old Earl of Dinton. But that mourning was fated to be renewed, — and lo! the best of men, on the threshold of happiness as great as this world can afford, was struck down into the grave.

And now, just as the sable suits necessitated by that deplorable event were laid aside, — another wedding was in progress, and the venerable mansion so lately darkened by affliction, was bright with jollity and joy.

A dent still remained in the wall of the grand staircase, caused by carrying down the coffin of the late Earl. But his memory had departed out of the house. The establishment of the new Earl scarcely knew him by name. In the whole family, Edgar alone still mourned for his friend.

It was perhaps because a little ashamed of the celerity with which the two late Earls had been consigned to oblivion, that the present head of the family, when some gossip of the gay party assembled under his roof noticed to him the change in Lord Wilchester's appearance and the depression of his air, replied mysteriously — "An *affaire de cœur*, poor fellow. The course of true love, as Pope tells us, never doth run smooth. — But not a word to poor Wilchester, who is rather sore upon the subject."

That some one of the twenty or thirty guests now daily assembled at his father's table did venture to notice it, is more than probable. For after a week's endurance of music and dancing, — charades and *tableaux*, which appeared to him positive desecration of that time-honoured roof, his place at the breakfast-table was vacant one morning; and Lady Theodosia informed her parents, by her brother's desire, that he would return home in time for the wedding; but that, in the interim, he had business to transact, in London, connected with his uncle's will.

No one believed in the excuse. Law business to

be transacted in September, is like salmon fishing in January, or skaiting in June. The younger guests decided that he was off to the Moors; and the elder accepted Lady Dinton's pretext that Edgar could not get through the summer without sea-bathing. "The hot rooms, and a too-well ventilated House of Commons, had completely done him up." — And as his sad face had rendered him somewhat of a kill-joy in the wedding party, all were resigned to his departure, with the exception perhaps of pretty Maude Grandison; who, among the advantages she had promised herself from her brother Berty's marriage into the Dinton family, had reckoned largely on the chance of becoming a Viscountess. Even when the unauspicious son of a younger brother, Edgar had always been a favourite at Blandhurst; and his short visit to his parents during the Italian sojourn of the Grandisons was chiefly devoted to the pastime of flirting with Maude.

It was to this circumstance, indeed, that Mrs. Grandison attributed the recent coolness of the Dintons. But as, in London, the assiduities of their son Albert to Lady Theodosia had been equally unacceptable, she was not without hope, that in a large country-house, with all its means and appliances of flirtation, shrubberies, — corridors, — conservatories, — billiard-rooms, — kiosks, — and moss-houses, — the Italian romance might proceed to a second chapter.

Whether in French, English, or Italian, Maude was an incomparable actress. Thanks to the semi-professional society frequenting Blandhurst, the daughters, to be out of the way of whose noisy, flippant companions, Mr. Grandison was at that moment cruising off the Orkneys, might have taken part with credit in any species of scenic representation, — from Ponsard's doleful classicalities, to a pantomime.

It was, consequently, a trying moment to poor Maude when she found another hand than Lord Wilchester helping her to Dundee marmalade, and offering to take his cues at rehearsal. But before breakfast was over, she rallied her spirits; Edgar was to come back for the wedding; and, in the interim, Lord Alan Hill and his brother Frederick were far better supernumeraries in their theatricals; while the Comte de St. Marcel,

> With his eyes as black as the fruit of the thorn,
> And his hooky nose, and his beard half-shorn,
> Like a half-converted Rabbin,

proved to be as incomparable an actor *on* as *off* the stage.

A succession of fashionable idlers supplied them with a crowded audience; some attracted to the Castle by the fame of Loncier; — some by the report that Jonathan had pronounced Lord Dinton's new billiard-table to be the finest in the kingdom; some of the best of partridge-shooting, — and more still from having nothing to do with themselves till the commencement

of cub-hunting. — It was just such a life as the new Earl had dreamed of as Paradise upon earth, at the period when, as the Honourable Gerald, he was endeavouring to educate his parents, and convert the old Castle into a Club. —

But for their foreign education, Theodosia and Albert Grandison would probably have complained of the publicity attending their courtship. — But as it was, they evidently thought there could not be too many sharers in their joy; — and since denied her wish of seeing her daughter becoming a foreign princess, Lady Dinton seemed resolved to extract as much satisfaction as might be, out of so wretched a match. — The chances of happiness for her child, never entered her flighty head. — All she cared for, was that the wedding should be a brilliant one; and that, since obliged, after all, to stoop to the Grandisons, they should behold her, like Juno in her car, driving her best peacocks.

The only extenuating circumstance amidst all the bad taste displayed just then under the old roof, was the little that had been attempted in the way of decoration. The Dintons had adopted too completely the habits of continental life, to dream of making a town mansion of their country-house. — In all other lands but England, the country being inhabited only when the leaves are on the trees and the flowers in bloom, ostentation within doors, is held superfluous.

"It is such a comfort, my dear Lady Dinton," observed Mr. Grandison, on her arrival at the Castle, "to sit down on a chair without being afraid to injure the tapestry; and to find a simple marble table to set down one's coffee-cup, instead of gilding and mosaic. At Lynchcombe one stands transfixed before the doorways by the gorgeousness of the embroidered *portières;* all looking so stiff, and so new, that one fancies the upholsterer cannot be quite out of the house." —

"We have not yet visited Lynchcombe," said Lady Dinton, coldly; nor have I ever had the curiosity to drive over to the new house at Harrals. — When I last saw it, the scaffolding was still up. — But I confess I saw little to admire. — My brother has all the sense and information desirable for a County Member. — But his eye is as uneducated as that of a charity-schoolboy; and he has no more taste than a red Indian. — Give him war-paint enough, — gilding, and glaring colours, — brocade, and velvet, — and he will fancy he has attained perfection."

Mrs. Grandison was perhaps of opinion that the sister was as fond of glare and show in her person, as the brother in his upholstery. — But she would fain have added more in disparagement of Lynchcombe, had not the rejection of her son's proposal to the heiress, been so generally known. —

The grand dilemma meanwhile, which occupied the family synod at Molyneux Castle, was exactly as Hilda

had foretold; was how to invite the rich brother and his daughter, omitting the poor sister and hers. — For a thousand reasons, the Wroughtons were impossible guests. — Even Berty did not wish to expose his wooing to Hilda's contemptuous scrutiny. — Still, it seemed hard to Theodosia that her favourite cousin should be absent from the great solemnity of her life; and equally so to her mother that the wedding should be deprived of the *éclât* and interest to be derived from the presence of the heiress of Lynchcombe. —

"And pray don't you intend to invite my governor and his etcetera, to witness this happy event?" inquired Lord Alan Hill, of his hostess, when they were fixing the wedding-day. — "As lord-lieutenant of the county, the Duke considered himself entitled to preside over all such domestic executions occurring within his jurisdiction. — As to my poor mother, who has not had a glimpse of orange-blossoms since the day that relieved her of the last of her daughters, it would be really unkind to leave her out."

It would have been hard to hint, to even this least respectful of sons, that the presence of the Duchess would be about as cheerful an addition to the party, as if the hearse and six, which conveyed the two last Earls of Dinton to the family vault, were to appear with all its escutcheons at the church door.

"My uncle Reuben, Fred. tells me, is likely to come unasked, or rather self-asked," added Lord Alan.

"Dinton had a long letter from him this morning, of which he did not disclose the contents otherwise than by a face as long as the letter."

"Then it could not be to the purport you suppose," said the Countess, cautiously. "For no one's company is more welcome to us than Mr. Howard's."

"Fred. and I settled it so, because, at this time of year, — when her Majesty's Court is in the Highlands, and her Majesty's law courts nowhere, — Tattersalls as dusty and deserted as Poet's Corner, and the Clubs cleaning their smoke-jacks and airing their head-waiters, — my uncle is apt to take sanctuary at the Abbey. — He makes his appearance, like the ortolan, as soon as the grapes are ripe."

A sad prospect for Lady Dinton.

Even the Duchess was a less alarming guest than Reuben Howard; always dissatisfied himself, and the cause of dissatisfaction in others.

"If you have not yet invited him," continued Lord Alan, a little less in awe of his uncle than the lady-born Woolston-crossed-with-Wraysbury, "you had better lose no time. For, like the spiteful old fairy in the Sleeping Beauty, he is likely enough to start from behind a curtain, or a haunch of venison, on the eventful day, and endow Lady Theodosia Grandison with some fatal wedding fruit."

The disappointed Countess winced at hearing the name of Grandison applied to her daughter. But she

justly surmised that Mr. Howard would care as little for an invitation to Molyneux Castle as to a meeting of the Young Man's Mutual Improvement Society.

The contents of the Negotiator-General's lengthy epistle would have been difficult for his nephews to anticipate. — He wrote to give his friend Dinton a severe jobation touching his recent disposal of an important piece of preferment. — Not that old Reuben had asked for it for any friend of his own, but Lord Dinton ought to have understood that it was possible he might ask for it, or, at all events, ought to have consulted *him* previous to giving it away. The world, he informed his noble friend, was aware that he had exercised considerable influence in the arrangement of his lordship's household affairs, and would be probably inferred that he had interfered on the present occasion.

"My nephew Harmondswyke," continued Reuben, "who, having seen a good deal lately of your son, pretends to some insight into your family affairs, declares that you have given the living in question to some protégé of Lord Wilchester's, who claimed it on the ground that it had been all but promised him by your late brother. But this I can scarcely believe. If every sovereign acceding to a throne were forced to fulfil the engagements of his predecessor, what power would remain for himself?

"With respect to the man for whose brother I solicit the living, I must say that no one ever deserved better of an administration than he of the party to which you have promised your support. By him, the dirtiest of work has been done in the neatest of manner, and without a murmur. He has burrowed for us below the newspaper press, like a rat in a sewer; and instead of demanding a good-service pension, he asks only to have his brother (a respectable man, I make no doubt,) provided for in the church. — Harmondswyke insists that we degrade ourselves by employing such caitiffs. But if he were not an ignoramus upon stilts, he would be aware that even the mighty crocodile has recourse to a little insignificant bird to pick the worms out of its tongue.

"In short, my dear Dinton, if this Mr. Harpinton, or whatever his name may be, should not be already inducted, think twice of it. Reflect what will be said in official circles, when it comes to be known that you have thrown away above a thousand a-year on a fellow to whom neither you nor government has the smallest obligation. — I really could not be at the trouble of undertaking your defence. — Harmondswyke, who though habitually half asleep, contrives to see further into matters than people who are wide awake, and we all know that '*qui respiciunt ad pauca de facilè pronunciant*,' pretends that this Mr. Harpsden is a nephew of Lady Dinton's, and a young man of great merit and

scholarship. But I must be permitted to doubt it. For with Sir John Wraysbury at the head of the family, he would necessarily be provided for. If such a man cannot take care of his poor relations, what is the use of him? — As to university distinction, every body knows that in these times scholarship is a serious hindrance to a churchman.

"In short, my dear Lord, I again entreat you to get out of the scrape as speedily as you can; and believe me

"Your faithful humble servant,

"R. H."

Though a little staggered to find he had incurred the wrath of even the *dii minores* of his new Olympus, Lord Dinton, to do him justice, entertained no thoughts of breaking faith with a son, who, since his accession, had proved so docile to his guidance. But he feared it would be a difficult matter to propitiate old Reuben. That Cerberus of the darker mysteries of clubs and politics, must not be offended, even in the prison of his jackal. But what cake of meal and honey was to be flung at his feet? Already, Lord Dinton had hacked his losing horses, and purchased his screws, to the infinite disgust of his head groom; and though he derived some courage from being surrounded by a few brisk-witted lordlings promising to become Reuben Howard's hereafter, it was useless for a middle-

aged man like himself to anticipate shade from seedling araucarias.

"Rather hard," thought the individual who, though he sealed his letters with a coronet, was still at heart Old Molyneux, "with rank and fortune like mine, to possess less influence in what is called the world, than when a seedy younger brother. I remember the time, not fifteen years ago, when Reuben Howard stood nearly as much in awe of *me* as I of Reuben; — and at Crockfords, by Jove, I had the best of it! All the result of linking prematurely into a family man, and being smothered like Desdemona, in a feather bed."

In point of fact, independent of the persecution of the old man of the sea he had strapped upon his shoulders, Lord Dinton was considerably the worse for his resumption of English habits. — After being acclimatized on the continent, and accustomed to light meals, light wines, and light conversation, — three gormandizings a-day, under the name of breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, perpetual haunches of venison and turins of turtle, — lime punch and loaded claret, — sherry that would have puzzled the brains of John Locke, — and heavy politics that would have puzzled the wits of Canning, were making sad inroads into his constitution. — He was becoming bilious of a morning, and muzzy at night; and had more than once exclaimed within himself, like the Eastern fakir,

"What is the use of riches? — Will they give a man a double appetite, or double digestion?"

As to the winter's hunting to which he was pretending to look forward, he shivered at the thoughts of those untimely risings, likely to end in immersion in a half-frozen brook, or a broken collar-bone; with as many pains and aches the following day, as were instilled into the bones of Caliban by the magic of Prospero. And this, while living within eight miles of the Pytchley; and having six hunters in his stables, for which he had given — no, for which Reuben Howard had given for him, — a sum of two thousand pounds! — "If, in my time, I could have commanded such a stud," thought he, "would not the old club have heard news of me." — And lo! between his teeth he muttered a wise saw which the street philosophy of Rome had imprinted in his memory:

"Se 'lgiovanne sapesse e'l vecchio potesse,
Non surìû cosa che non si facesse." —

With all this, neither his earldom, his forty thousand per annum, nor even the patronage of Reuben Howard, had secured a higher alliance for his only daughter, than her play-mate for ten years past, albeit he had said to her, like Sir Epicure Mammon in the Alchemist,

"To-day thou shalt have ingots; and to-morrow,
Give lords the affront;"

or inspired his only son with higher objects of am-

bition in love or friendship, than a couple of necessitous cousins. Nay, his own magnificent castle was at that moment filled with Grandisons, St. Marcel, Fred. Hill, and others of his old clique, — the same mischievous, thriftless, songless chaffinches, which had pecked his cherries on the Chiaja and Piazza di Spagna, just as they now fluttered over his pine-apples.

It did not, of course, occur to him how little change had occurred in his own idiosyncracy, since the days when he ran against John Woolston in the Strand, and shuffled him off as a poor relation; to the present time, when he carefully avoided all public contact with Sir John Wraysbury, the millionary, as an irretrievable snob. Or that, as to every plant is allotted its insect parasites, the same aphides, generated by his selfish egotism, were still preying on the unregenerated stalk of Old Molyneux, Earl of Dinton! —

CHAPTER XXI.

One morning, shortly before the day fixed for the reception at Lynchcombe of Philip Woolston and his family, — a day in early September, when the atmosphere is golden as amber, and the beautiful scenery of that favoured spot seemed ripe with plenty, — the rich interchange of gifts between the parting Summer and coming Autumn, resembling the largesse which signalizes an interview between two eastern sovereigns; the thymy slopes that exhaled their exquisite aroma into the sunshine, did not entice the panting deer from the shelter of the spreading oaks or drooping chestnuts, where they lay huddled and crouching on, till their antlers seemed to grow out of the moss. — Nearer the house, a carpet of flower beds, rich and variegated as a prairie, dazzled the eye with their brilliancy. Towering magnolias, and the double flowering benzmansia, in full blossom, loaded the air with their fragrance.

Janetta, who had received that morning, from the happy Theodosia, a letter containing the warmest expressions of regret that the presence of Captain Grandison at his brother's wedding would render it painful to her to accomplish the general wish for her

presence, was a little soothed, both by the endearing phrases of her cousin, and the certitude they conveyed of the perfect felicity of the writer.

"Berty and I can hardly fail to be happy together," wrote Lady Theodosia. "We have known each other so long, that even our respective faults appear like old friends; and we love each other so much, in spite of them, that we have nothing to quarrel about. — My father and mother have been everything that is generous and indulgent. — In short, dearest Netta, we have not a wish ungratified."

Miss Wraysbury wished she could forget having heard the broken-hearted, white-haired recluse of Havermead give utterance to the self-same declamation, only on the preceding New Year's Day! — But she determined to see the marriage in the same auspicious light it was viewed by Theo.; and it certainly imparted an improved perspective to Lynchcombe, that, at some future time, Blandhurst would be inhabited by a couple so fond and so friendly. The affectionate terms in which she was addressed by Theodosia, almost put her into conceit with cousins in general.

It occurred to her that, having promised to accompany her father on horseback, when the glare of day abated, to visit Lulworth, to the beauties of which he had long promised to introduce her, Hilda might be inclined to quit the easel to which she had of late exclusively devoted herself, and join the riding party.—

No encounter with Edgar was to be apprehended; no projected visit would be lost; for Theodosia's letter expressly stated, that her brother was at the Castle;— "not in such spirits as we could wish. But he probably reverts, poor fellow, to the ill-starred wedding preparations in progress in this house, scarcely a year ago." Miss Wroughton might consequently enjoy a charming ride upon Harry's favourite mare.

But as Helena had, for some time past, abjured her former habits of sauntering familiarly into Hermia's sitting room, Janetta proceeded first to ascertain from Aunt Wroughton, whether the proposal would be acceptable. — She was not particularly fond of consulting that busiest of bees; for the modern Penelope had a way, when addressed on even the most interesting topic, of stopping short in her knitting, and, with the air of a martyr, placing a tight thumb upon the stitch in progress, till her interlocutor was pleased to leave off molesting her with such idle news as a change of ministry, or that an Oriental steamer had foundered.

On the present occasion, however, she laid down her knitting needles as cheerfully as a man does his cue after winning a well-contested game at billiards. For she had that morning completed the shawl destined for Lady Theodosia Grandison; as heavy, and as be-hieroglyphed, in its full development, as the broad sheet of the dullest newspaper going.

"Come with me, my dear, to her room," said

she, — taking her niece so firmly and so affectionately by the arm that resistance was useless. "I never answer for Hilda. The wind bloweth where it listeth, Netta; and I have never seen the compass able to interpret my daughter's inclinations."

Now it happened that the wind which was blowing in Miss Wroughton's apartment, not figuratively but literally, was a vigorous south-easter; and as it also happened that, in order to enjoy the delicious fragrance of magnolias and dalinas already described, Hilda was leaning from the open window, to inhale the atmosphere of the gardens, the draught of air created by the door that opened to admit her mother and cousin, scattered, in all directions, the papers lying on her writing-table, one or two of which fell upon the floor. —

Mrs. Wroughton was about to stoop and pick up one, wafted from her daughter's desk to her feet, when Netta graciously prevented her, and seized the paper, which she hastily replaced on the table. Not so hastily, however, but that she had perceived it to be a closely written letter, and that the opening line consisted of— "My dearest Edgar!"

All was accomplished, however, before Miss Wroughton, who was listening to the rustling of the leaves, the song of the linnets, and the still sweeter music echoing in the depths of her heart, turned round, and discovered that she was not alone.

By that time, the agitated Netta could as easily have uttered her meditation invitative, as she could have addressed Her Majesty's House of Commons; — even under the school-boyish, ill-bred aspect it assumed, when summoned to the bar of Her Majesty's House of Lords.

There she stood, beside the writing-table, white, tremulous, breathless, — when Hilda turned, from her exquisite enjoyment of the garden atmosphere, — her eyes, lips, and cheeks, coloured by pleasurable sensations.

"Go with them to Lulworth? — Thankfully. It was what she had long wished!"

But what would she not have liked and been grateful for, at that happy moment? The world, according to poor Janetta's appreciation of worlds, was at her feet.

Gladly would the less fortunate cousin have recalled her proposal. — But it was too late. Repugnant as the expedition had become, she must bear with the company of Edgar's chosen love, — the future Viscountess Wilchester. — Having hastily retreated to her own room, and bolted herself in, she indulged in that luxury of tears which, from time immemorial, has solaced so many sorrows: especially those arising between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one.

At first, indeed, she fancied that the ride was now out of the question; that the effort was beyond her

power; that she should weep out, — speak out, — and, perhaps, denounce to her father the abominable hypocrisy of her companion. — But by degrees recurred softly to her memory the exhortations of the gentle voice which had admonished her, that similar efforts constituted the heroism of private life; — that self-government is one of the greatest of human virtues; and that, as Shakespeare tells us, "upon such sacrifices, the gods themselves throw incense."

The sense of duty finally prevailed; and after an hour's respite and self-communing, she unbolted her door, and submitted patiently to have her habit fastened on by her maid. When she reached the hall door, only a few minutes after the hour appointed by her father, Hilda and the horses were waiting, on which account she had to submit to the bitter rebuke on the part of Sir John, on the odious ill-breeding of unpunctuality.

He was not long, however, in regaining his usual equanimity. His morning's letters had been highly satisfactory. While Walkingham wrote to inform him that a farm, long on his hands, had been advantageously let, Wortham and Stock apprized him, on one of their largest and woolliest sheets of paper, that the ground at Butterhead, which he had so peremptorily refused to make over to the firm of "Wraysburys, Nephews," was now selling at so much per inch instead of so much per acre.

He was consequently disposed to be chatty; but as even a man endowed with seventy thousand per annum, and estimating himself at that amount to the utmost doit, cannot condescend to veer at once from stormy to fair, he addressed himself to Hilda rather than to his unpunctual daughter.

There were not many subjects, indeed, on which they could sympathize. But as he was pleased to allude to Frankfort and its mercantile circles, Hilda was able to supply many interesting traits of the Rothschild dynasty, familiar to most residents on the banks of the Main.

At length, even Miss Wroughton was so struck by the silence and pallid face of her cousin, as to point them out to Sir John.

"I have a bad headache," she replied, when questioned. "I shall be better when we reach the sea."

"You have often bad headaches now, Netta," said her father, almost severely. "Your poor mother, too, was subject to headaches; — and I am persuaded the habit may be checked by proper exertion. — It makes a woman a wretched companion to others, my dear, as well as a burthen to herself."

Hilda Wroughton was sufficiently familiar with the temper of her uncle to be little surprised at hearing this chronic infirmity attributed to the late Lady Wraysbury. But she *did* think, that Netta, blest with all this world could bestow, was a little perverse to be

so often out of spirits. The scoldings of Sir John were not likely to rouse her to a happier frame of mind. — But as they proceeded, now by a brisk walk, now by an easy canter, along the brow of the cliffs commanding a view of the open Channel, she scarcely knew in what terms to accost her taciturn companion; whose miserable depression of spirit the over-happy girl found it difficult to interpret. For, alas! the worst problem of the Tutor's Assistant imposed upon her by Miss Avesford, had never reduced poor Netta's countenance to such woful elongation, as the "Dearest Edgar" inscribed in the flowing hand-writing of her treacherous cousin.

Strange spite, — and strange caprice of fortune! — That she, the prettier, kindlier, better of the two, with her hazel eyes and teeming millions, should have to undergo the patronage of a hard-minded, hard-hearted girl, whose knowledge was as uncataloguable as the books of the British Museum, and whose nature as rugged as a fragment of oak-bark, viewed through a microscope.

The ride wore to an end, — the day wore to an end. — But not so the troubles of Janetta. She could not dismiss from her thoughts that one perplexing incident. She could not make up her mind whether firmly to declare to her cousin what she had seen, and what she knew to be the state of things between her and Lord Wilchester; or whether to wait patiently,

through days and weeks of worry, till it pleased the happy couple to come forward as frankly to their family as to each other.

Had she deserved it of them, that they should deal thus mistrustfully with her? And did not such dealing justify any retribution with which she might think proper to visit them?

Retribution? — What could she do, — what could she say for which they cared one atom! — Happy in each other, happy in their pleasant prospects, what was to *them* the withdrawal of their poor cousin's affection, or the peevishness of a Sir John Woolston Wraysbury?

When the day arrived for the solemn reception of Philip Woolston and his family, it was almost a relief to Janetta. Anything rather than the trial of perpetually confronting Hilda Wroughton: that impostor who, with all her pretences of humility, was sitting there triumphantly enjoying her secret possession of all the wealth of the Indies. — Beloved by Edgar! — The future mistress of Molyneux Castle, with all its associations of worth and wisdom. The elected of that future Lord Dinton whose name would hereafter become honoured in the land, as *his* who was now reaping the reward of his virtues.

The Woolstons of Wormley in due time made their appearance; worthy people, apparently, — but with a considerable quantity of Wiltshire clay adhering to

that of nature. They had never been at the trouble to cut off even their native dialect; preferred spectacles to eyeglasses, and made the marble halls of Lynchcombe ring with the double soles of their dogskin shoes, such people as one sees in Paris, in "*Les Anglaises pour rire*," and occasionally, in England, in the state-pew of some neighbourings squire, in a country church.

They were, however, far from disagreeable inmates, particularly under existing circumstances,—good home-baked bread, that might be eaten without fear of deleterious ingredients. Philip Woolston talked parish and county business, as strenuously as more enlightened men talk politics; or as *very* enlightened men talk European politics; and though it was with a burr that sounded as if he had swallowed the husks of his filberts as well as the kernel, and though the fingers with which he told off his arguments were as thickly jointed as a bamboo cane, he gave utterance to no ungentlemanlike sentiments. He was thoroughly of his order: — thoroughly a representative of the territorial gentry of Great Britain.

His wife, as wives are apt and perhaps ought to be, was a milder shadow of himself. Full of the most genuine admiration of the splendour of Lynchcombe, she could not quite restrain herself from dusting off by a stroke of her best cambric handkerchief, any speck of dust she saw alighting upon the velvet otto-

man or inlaid tables. With Mrs. Wroughton she was, at once, as cheerful as confidential, as her maid with Mr. Dysart.

But to Netta she paid no court. Netta was to her a pretty girl scarcely eighteen; too young to be talked to. It never occurred to her that she was the heiress of Lynchcombe; in the first place, because her sons were schoolboys: in the next, because, had they been Captains of Dragoons, she had never heard of maternal manœuvres such as are held lawful by a Duchess of Groby. But above all, because she thought much less of Lynchcombe and its seventy thousand a-year, than of Harralls and its eight. If any member of the family besides Sir John moved her regard and respect, it was the "young Harry, with his beaver up," who was busy just then with his Greek testament, on a paint-bare bench at Eton: the future Woolston of Harrals who shut out the sunshine from his own offspring.

To one so devoid of all pretension as Janetta, the shy girls readily attached themselves. But they could not altogether divest themselves of awe of the stern countenance and dignified bearing of Hilda Wroughton. Aware that German was her natural language, they had a vague idea that she must have seen the Wild Huntsman in the Black Forest, and assisted at Witch Sabbaths on the Brocken, and in the gigantic corridors and Elisabethan halls, so new to them, they clung to

Miss Wraysbury as to a good spirit, who would interpose between them and Teutonic temptation. For in Netta, as in my uncle Toby, "there was a frankness not so much the effect of familiarity, as its cause."

How happy she must be, they thought, — how happy she must be, they exclaimed, — to be the inhabitant of such a Paradise, — "a fairy palace, like what people read of in books, or dream of in dreams."

As to its future proprietorship, they were not of an age to think about it. The name of "heiress" expressed nothing to them. To live at Lynchcombe, enjoy its flowers and lawns, — ride upon Bunda, or sail in the Alga when the weather was propitious; — or retreat, on a rainy day, into the glorious library or pleasant music-room, — what delights, — what varied and varying enjoyment!

Poor Netta! — Poor "companionless sensitive Plant," over whose tremulous foliage —

> The lagging hours of the day went by
> Like windless clouds on a tender sky,

leaving no trace of a single pleasurable sensation; — her brother and sister estranged from her; — her father buried breast-deep in the pomps and vanities of his position; a triumphant rival in perpetual evidence before her; — the man she had prepared herself to love and honour, standing aloof, as from an enemy; she, *she* to be envied!

From the rich furniture and treasures of art lavish-

ed around her, she turned to the hollow cavern of her neglected heart, and shuddered at its forlornness. And what hope was there of improvement? Had she been simply one of half-a-dozen Miss Woolstons of Harrals, she would have been allowed to cultivate a thousand humble pleasures, to supply the place of her vanished idol. But though Sir John allowed her to indulge in liberal benefactions to public charities, he considered that the heiress of Lynchcombe had no business to indulge, as her Denny Crossaunts might have done, in disturbing the cottages of the poor, or curing old women of the rheumatism. Just as Miss Wraysbury was supplied with Whydah birds and Hoopoes, for pets, instead of the pigeons of which *he* had been used to hold out his sieve in holiday time beside the old fig-tree in the stringed stable-yard, she must content herself with doing good in a dignified manner, through the medium of bankers, secretaries, and a public subscription list. In her desart, not alone the springing fountain was denied, but the rain-drop from Heaven.

It would have amused a keen observer like Farmer, — it would even have amused the less clear-sighted Uncle Hugh, to see Sir John Wraysbury unconsciously verifying the adage that, "drive away Nature, and she will return in a hand gallop." — Not all the dukes and duchesses he had been cultivating; not even the Reuben Howard, whose slightest notice so tickled his vanity, had proved half such pleasant company to the

millionary, as the bucolic country cousin, whom, in dread of whose rusticity, he had invited only neighbours of the second magnitude to meet. With the Woolstons of Wormley, he was in his element. With the Woolstons of Wormley, Woolston of Harrals stood on *his* natural level.— Among *them*, he was entitled to prose and lay down the law. Among *them*, he could talk about the House of Commons as of a place wherein he was accustomed to say to this member, "speak," and he spoke; — or to another, "vote," and he voted; instead of being content to sneak into his place, and guiltless of politics, talk hay and straw with one or two of his Northamptonshire colleagues, or French and English three per cents. with one of the Lombard Street money-mill-owners of Mammondom.

Had he surmised how great a man, and how affable he appeared in their unsophisticated eyes, instead of estimating himself as he had hitherto done, simply as a man who could spend his fifteen hundred pounds per week without wincing, he would, perhaps, have begun to fancy that Roger Farmer's valuation of his abilities had not been excessive; and that it had formerly depended on himself to become eventually the legal guardian of all the lunatics and wealthy orphans in the kingdom; and the arbitrator of all dilemmas where the roguery of man has endeavoured to outwit the roguery of his fellow.

Amazing what simple things he was obliging

enough to render complex, by explaining them to his simple-minded visitors. Like some yokel at the Crystal Palace, doing the honours of a piece of inedited machinery, he told them how the thingumies went round the what d'ye-call-'ems in political life and fashionable circles, as would only have been attempted by an unmitigated snob.

Could Lady Mary Molyneux, who still preserved in lavender, laid by in a curious little old ebony desk, a knot of crimson velvet, which John Woolston of Harrals had admired in her hair, at a Northampton ball, some years before the passing of the Reform Bill, have heard him astonish the weak minds of his Wiltshire kinsfolk, by accounts of the last meeting at Lord Derby's, in a tone as mysterious as would have served to double the salary at a patent theatre of a conspirator in the *dramatis personæ* of Venice Preserved, — she would have flung the faded love token out of window; and herself, perhaps, on her knees, — to thank Heaven for not having prospered her wish of becoming Lady Mary Woolston Wraysbury of Lynchcombe. —

CHAPTER XXII.

WHILE endeavouring, to the utmost of her power, to deaden and subdue her sense of inward misery, in order to render cheerful the sojourn of strangers within her father's gates, — escaping from them as little as she dared, to commune with her own heart in her own chamber, Janetta could not but remark, a change in the deportment of Hilda.

The haughty girl was gradually becoming as bland as Lady Clementine Averdon Malins; courteous to the strangers, — and kind to all. That this novel graciousness arose spontaneously, from the happy love concealed in her heart, like the luminous vapours emanating from the gold mines of Kremnitz, which are said to have discovered them to the neighbouring peasants, was easy to guess. — No one, however, but poor Netta, seemed to surmise the secret. No one had ever alluded to her mysterious visits to West Cove. Everything and everybody conspired to favour the happy Hilda. — And lo! the daughter of the Frankfort adventurer seemed to do to her Wormley cousins the honours of Lynchcombe, rather than its future heiress.

The original invitation given to the strangers had

been twice extended; for Sir John experienced the greatest delight, in parading his kinsman the squire over his model farms: ostensibly, to ask his advice, but in reality, to show him what Mammon, per aid of his Birmingham and Leedsfoundries, and the Agricultural Society, could effect in the way of high-farming; dragging up the fruits of the earth out of its bosom, by the aid of Apothecaries' Hall, and pullies and cylinders, rather than by the sunshine and the shower.

The very manners were of chemical creation; and Philip Woolston as full of wonder at these elaborations as the linendraper's apprentice at hearing the tragic prose of Mrs. Siddons applied to the stoutness of Russia sheeting, began to ask himself whether it could have been real clover and genuine turnips he had been growing all these years, without a single patent machine, or morsel of fuss.

At length, however, the last bone-mill had been exhibited; the last sail to Portland accomplished; and the Alga was sentenced to be laid up for the winter, greatly to the sorrow of Netta, who seemed to think that at Woolwich Cove and its fishing cottage, there lingered associations like the perfume of incense, impregnating the walls of a catholic church with the odour of sanctity. Philip Woolston and his gratified brood took their departure in the Wraysbury barouche-and-four for the Dorchester rail; and Janetta said

within herself, as hostesses are apt to do after getting rid of a heavy party, "*Now*, then, let us be once more comfortable."

As a preliminary step, perhaps, she betook herself to Mrs. Wroughton's apartments, to ascertain whether Sir John had any more hospitalities in prospect: — October being a month in which a country gentleman's pheasants entitle him to ensnare his friends, as much as in September his partridges, or, in winter, his battues. Aunt Clara's rooms were situated in the same corridor with those of her niece, But such are the forms kept up in families where genuine love and humanity do not raze all barriers of ceremony, that Janetta seldom intruded.

On the present occasion, the moment seemed to be ill-chosen. On entering the room, she found Mrs. Wroughton, who usually sat established in her arm-chair as fixedly as the Lady in Comus, pacing up and down with hurried footsteps: and the effect was as startling as though the statue of George III. had dismounted from its charger at Charing Cross, and stepped into the nearest barber's for the abrogation of its pigtail. — What could be the matter? — Her knitting-needles were hung up for monuments, like the bruised arms of the soldan of York and Lancaster, or the be-rusted ones of Achilles.

> Her thimble on inglorious myrtles hung,
> Her needles scattered, and her beads unstrung,

Miss Wraysbury stood transfixed on the threshold. But, still more to her surprise, the usually tepid and torpid Aunt Clara rushed up to her the moment she saw her, and enfolded her in a close embrace.

"Has anything occurred?" inquired Netta, who, like the claret-defrauded English admiral, when summoned to leave a French dinner-table because dinner was over, — fancied the house must be on fire.

"My dear, dear niece!" was all that the hysterical Mrs. Wroughton could say in reply; but by degrees she recovered her wonted utterance. "To think that all my anxieties should be already over! — To think of having secured such a home for her, without having so much as encountered the rough trials of society. — I am *too* happy, *too* fortunate! — Not eighteen for the next four months, and on the point of so unexceptionable a match! — Netta, my dearest Netta, wish me joy!"

With glowing cheeks, Miss Wraysbury obeyed. She dared not ask a single question. In time, all would develop itself.

"Hilda is gone to announce her happy prospects to your father," resumed Mrs. Wroughton. "She wished to speak first to yourself. But I told her that Sir John would not be pleased if any body in the house were apprized before himself."

Miss Wraysbury could not help thinking that, come when or how it might, the news would reach her father

only too soon. — She dreaded the thought of his disappointment.

"So few girls gifted with Hilda's beauty and talents would have had the moderation to content herself with such a choice," resumed Mrs. Wroughton; — "his father likely to live for years, and having so many other claims upon his property. But then, my dear girl knew the worth of the man she loved; and the perfect sympathy of character and principle between them. — You must have noticed, my dear, at the time of the late poor Lord Dinton's death, how strong was their mutual attachment."

"I have long seen, or rather surmised it," faltered Miss Wraysbury, taking her aunt's neglected knitting into her hands, that, by bending over it, she might conceal her confusion of countenance.

"Such a fortunate chance, that visit of his to Frankfort, before my poor girl had formed any other acquaintance. So that the first words of love addressed to her will be the last. My nephew came, saw, and conquered, and will remain for time and eternity the master of the field."

The delighted mother was becoming almost eloquent, — but almost tiresome. — She was so thoroughly happy! The notion of leaving at her death, in a state of comparative dependence, that high-spirited daughter to whom to eat the bread and mount the stairs of the stranger was as bitter as to Dante, had been pain and

grief to her. Even at Lynchcombe, under the safeguard of her mother's wing, Hilda had scarcely patience to live as the bonds-woman of her pompous shabby-hearted uncle. And now, dear high-souled girl, she was about to have a home of her own; — a home where, as Mrs. Wroughton informed Miss Wraysbury, her affectionate nephew had already prevailed upon her to accept an asylum for life.

At that moment, her affectionate nephew's affianced wife suddenly made her appearance; looking flushed and harassed to a degree scarcely accordant with the happy and brilliant prospects of the future Viscountess Wilchester. Netta would have perceived in a moment that her father had been saying and doing his worst; but that she had enough to do to keep herself from fainting in the arm-chair, which luckily secured her from observation.

What would not that poor girl have given for strength, both moral and physical, to rise and offer the congratulations due to the exigency of the moment. — But she could as easily have prevented her lips from becoming blanched, or the cold moisture from rising upon her aching brows.

"Well, dearest! — What does your uncle say to it all,?" was Mrs. Wroughton's abrupt apostrophe to her daughter.

"Every thing that is most ungenerous, and most offensive," replied Hilda, in a hoarse voice: for she

did not at first notice that Janetta was in the room. — "He declares that the marriage shall not take place in this house; and that he will not, under any circumstances, afford it the smallest countenance. — Edgar's folly, he says, is no precedent for *him*. Impossible to be more unkind or more insolent."

"You must forgive my father, Hilda," said Miss Wraysbury, faintly, — stung by the harsh deportment of her cousin, out of all self-control. "You must forgive him at the first outburst of his surprise, some degree of bitterness and disappointment."

"Why bitterness?" cried Hilda, imperiously, though startled by this unexpected revelation of Janetta's presence. "Because a niece for whom he cares so little, is about to become the wife of a nephew for whom he cares still less?"

"He may feel, as I do, that you have neither of you dealt candidly with him," replied Miss Wraysbury, rallying her spirits to meet the excited tone of her cousin. — "His hospitality is never grudgingly bestowed; and it is scarcely creditable, in the eyes of even his household, that you should have been indulging in furtive interviews with my cousin, at West Cove, and elsewhere, when there needed only an explanation of your engagement to sanction his visits."

"And see to what results the explanation has given rise."

"Because offered too late. — My father was un-

prepared for such rapid arrangements. You have startled and shocked him."

"Sir John is not easily shocked. His nephew, too, was, and is, so painfully prejudiced by his share in that miserable Ash Bank affair, that he naturally shrank from an interview."

"But why more at Lynchcombe than in London? — He dined with us constantly in Carlton Gardens."

"Netta!" exclaimed both Mrs. Wroughton and her daughter, in the same reproachful tone.

"And they met night after night, at the House of Commons." —

The mother and daughter now exchanged glances, implying some apprehension that the fair Janetta, like the fair Ophelia, was losing her wits.

"So that he might as easily have come straight to Lynchcombe, as —"

Hilda was now on her knees before her cousin, gazing earnestly into her face.

"What is all this?" said she, in a scarcely audible voice. "How have these misunderstandings arisen? — My own dear little Netta, have I so completely misjudged you all this time? — I, who fancied that your change of manner towards me arose from disdain for the future wife of a poor parson! — To whom, to *whom* do you imagine that I am about to be married?" —

The trembling lips of Miss Wraysbury refused to

pronounce the name of Lord Wilchester. But her rising tears spoke for her; and all was clear in a moment.

"And I, who so distinctly told you from the first, that nothing upon earth would at any time have induced me to become Edgar's wife!" —

"Then why address him in your letter as, '*dearest* Edgar?' — Was that fair to Olave?"

"Little spy! — Little traitress! — Little jealous, *jealous* Netta!" cried Miss Wroughton, taking her cousin's cold hands into her own, and pressing them fondly to her lips, while tears of sympathy glittered in her dark eyes. — "*Why* address him as dearest Edgar? — Because he *is* the very dearest cousin (except yourself) in the world. — How can I say enough to him, — how can I do too much for him (except marry him,) when it is entirely to *his* generous interposition that Olave and I am indebted for our future happiness? It was he who persuaded Lord Dinton to give us the living of Hurdiston; — it was *he* who negotiated the exchange with the incumbent at Havermead; — it is he, in short, who has created a home for us, and made us the happiest and most grateful of human beings."

Janetta, whose blood was beginning to circulate, bent forward and imprinted a prolonged kiss on the forehead of her happy cousin.

"But surely," she pleaded, as soon as she could

command her voice, "it is not so *many* months ago that you mentioned to me his warm attachment to you."

"As among the things that had been. — But you cut me so short, dearest cousin, and so pointedly avoided all renewal of the discussion, that I knew not what to make of you. At one time, — pardon the susceptibility of female nature, and lay some blame on the personal and mental distinctions of my worshipped Olave, — I almost fancied you were jealous of the partiality of my poor glorious, half-starved school-usher."

Another kindly embrace was exchanged between them: — for no further delusion interposed or was likely to interpose between two hearts so genuine.

"When Edgar first visited us in Germany," resumed Miss Wroughton, — perceiving that her mother had quietly resumed her knitting, and that some further explanation was due to Janetta, — "he had just escaped from college, — and was ready to fall in love with the first girl that came in his way: — dark, fair, grave, gay, ignorant, or studious. — This was so apparent, that his addresses did not flatter me. Of the two giddy chatterboxes, I should have preferred Berty Grandison; who, having seen more of the world, was more amusing. But the truth is, Netta, that, some months before, Olave Harpsden, —

'Like an angel, came
And whipp'd the offending Adam out of me, —'

and his solemn views of life had rendered me graver than my age, — already saddened by domestic discomfort and impending disgrace. In a word, and to tell the whole truth, I was already desperately in love."

"And when you arrived in England?"

"I was already betrothed to Olave: — that is, as far as he would permit; for his magnanimous notions decided that I ought to be better acquainted with the habits and requirements of my own country, before I gave myself irrevocably away."

"I was not thinking of Olave; — I was thinking of Edgar."

"Well, Edgar, as a rejected man, was simply making proof of his superiority of character over your Captain Grandisons and Comtes de St. Marcel. — When we arrived at Harrals, he did his best to smooth the fortunes of an ill-starred cousin, whom he had once loved well enough to offer her his hand. But I had the satisfaction of perceiving, from the very moment of my arrival, that, in one short interim of absence, I had gained a friend, and lost a lover."

"But how, *lost* him?"

"*That* I leave to be accounted for by his English friends: it was either by acquired strength, or acquired weakness. — Either he had seen some person whom he liked better, — (and it was easy, — for there was never any congeniality between us,) or the disapproval

of his uncle, who did not wish him, having then his fortune to make, to marry too early; or, perhaps, the opposition of his oracle, Mr. Farmer, who dislikes intermarriages between cousins."

Janetta heaved a tremendous sigh.

"It was on that account, Netta, I ventured to remonstrate with him about the flirtation with yourself, in which he seemed disposed to indulge. I knew that those who had dissuaded once, might dissuade again; and felt — (how sincerely you will one day do me the justice to believe,) that your happiness was not to be trifled with."

"But all this, my dear children," interposed Mrs. Wroughton, looking up wistfully from her knitting, towards the two girls who, the one sitting and the other kneeling, still held each other's hands enclasped during this long wished-for reconciliation, — "all this brings us no nearer the point of a better understanding with my brother?"

"Surely when my father testified so much displeasure," argued Netta, addressing her cousin, "he was not aware that it was Olave to whom you were announcing an engagement."

"Perfectly. — He went over again his old grounds of offence against Mr. Harpsden; — such as the slight offence to Aunt Carry's memory, and even his unorthodox divinity."

"Which cannot and must not be visited on my

cousin," rejoined Netta, with more firmness than her wont. "On that point, leave me to talk to papa. He will receive expostulation better from his daughter, than from Aunt Clara or yourself."

"If you will only undertake a task so ungrateful. But do not forget to remind him what an escape he has had of finding this contemned nephew of his established for life at Hurdiston; and lecturing him, once a-week from the pulpit, on the virtue of Christian charity, and family union. But for Edgar's generous intervention, Sir John might have been driven away from divine worship at Hurdiston, as from Harrals."

"And what account am I to give him of Mr. Ashmead, — our future rector?"

"The very best. — A college friend of the late Lord Dinton, and, therefore, a contemporary of his own."

"But how comes a friend of poor Lord Dinton to desert Havermead?"

"The same motive that urges Olave to settle there, — a wife. Mrs. Ashmead connot bear the dulness of a secluded village; and, with several daughters growing up, thinks the neighbourhood of Hurdiston more advantageous. *She* looks forward with delight to the gossiping and marketing of a country town, which to *me* would be insupportable."

"And will the life of a country parsonage content you, Hilda?" inquired her cousin, with some anxiety.

"No new books, — no literary associates, — no mental excitement of any kind."

"I forgive you," said Miss Wroughton, sealing with her finger the indiscreet lips of the heiress; "for as yet, you know not Olave. With one such companion to exalt the mind and school the heart, who could care for the mere prattle of the world? — Aunt Bessy, too, at hand, — the dearest, and sweetest, and most exemplary of human beings; under whose roof I shall often see united the friends I love; — Edgar, — the Farmers, — and a certain Janetta Wraysbury, of whom, as I have not yet quite forgiven her, we will say no more. No, don't pity me, dear coz, — *pray* don't pity me. If you knew how much better a wife I shall make, to a studious scholar, and conscientious clergyman, than I should ever have done to a gay Viscount! — And we shall be scandalously rich. The living is rated at nine hundred a-year, and may be held with other preferment. — And now, go away, dear, best little Netta; or, rather come with me into my room; for I want to sit down and write a long letter to Olave."

"Not *too* long a one. Do not at present tell him a word about my father's unkindness. It will but cause him unnecessary pain. And I answer for it, that to-morrow shall furnish you with pleasanter news."

"I obey. — It is good for me, perhaps, to accustom myself both to the word and the duty."

"And if you are not of as jealous a temper as myself, Hilda, perhaps you will allow me to add a few words by way of postscript. I want to tell Olave — (do you think he will be affronted?) — how I watched him through the glass on board the Alga, taking leave of you at West Cove; and how I mistook him for another cousin; and — and *how*" —

"Better omit, at present, that part of the communication," said Hilda, laughing. "It is more of a confession than you seem aware of. — But don't let him, on that account, lose his postscript. Happy as he is, Olave will dearly prize it, — for dearly does he love and appreciate you. *I* have sometimes found myself nearly as jealous as yourself. — Content yourself with offering him your congratulations, and telling him you wish us well. Very little more is wanting to make us the happiest people in the world."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The task undertaken by Miss Wraysbury, of converting her father's opinions, within twenty-four hours, from stormy weather to fair, was not altogether so hopeless as may be supposed; for unreasonably obstinate people are usually unreasonably influenced.

It was not very difficult to satisfy him, in the onset, that, liking so little as he did the society of Hilda, he was fortunate in being relieved from it within twelve months of her introduction under his roof; more especially as it is not often, in these mercenary times, that a portionless girl, however otherwise endowed, obtains so early an establishment.

This point conceded, Janetta judiciously introduced the fact that the personal attractions of her cousin had effected a far greater conquest than even the new rector of Havermead. —

Sir John looked puzzled. "He had never noticed any particular attentions paid in that house to Miss Wroughton; or if paid, it was only as to his niece and *protégé*."

"Latterly, indeed, knowing his suit to be hopeless," added Janetta, "my cousin Edgar may have relaxed a little in his suit. — But before Hilda arrived at Har-

rals, — at Frankfort, — in her own house, — in her father's lifetime" —

"Pho, pho!" exclaimed Sir John, — seating himself in the nearest garden-seat, — for it was while promenading with her father up and down the central avenue of the great orangerie bordered with espaliers of orange and lemontrees in bloom, that Netta had commenced the discussion, — "any young man of Edgar's age would have allowed himself the liberty of that sort of free address to the daughter of such a fellow as Wroughton."

"To a high-minded girl like Hilda, Papa, no other address was likely to be offered, than a formal proposal for her hand." —

The reply of Sir John Wraysbury scarcely amounted to a word. — His gesture and smile, however, were more than sufficiently contemptuous. —

"And *that* proposal, she refused," added Janetta, steadily. —

"Refused the hand of Edgar? — Refused to become the Viscountess Wilchester? — Refused Molyneux Castle and forty thousand a-year?" — And a scornful laugh seemed to answer his own questions. —

"He was not then Lord Wilchester. — But my cousin certainly rejected the man who has since become so; and from that moment to this, has been consistent in declining to become his wife."

Sir John was silenced. — For many minutes he

sat motionless, looking like a clumsy marble effigy of a middle-aged M.P. — voted to its deceased representative by some prodigal borough. — Perhaps, he was considering how long a time it would require to reach his niece's apartments from the orangerie, beseech her forgiveness, and inform her that she was worth forty thousand pounds per annum more than he had ever imagined. — Hilda! — Hilda Wroughton, — endowed only with the reversion of eight thousand three hundred pounds and a fraction, disdain to become Countess of Dinton; when he, Sir John W. W., had an unhealable wound in his heart's core from having been refused by a narrowminded government the restoration of the Barony of Fitz-Alwyne? —

"You are *certain* of all this, Janetta," said he, — when his daughter, satisfied with the impression she had made, took a seat by his side on that gorgeous sofa, of bronze arabesques enlaced with foliage of or molu.

"Quite certain, Papa; — which considerably enhances the generous conduct of my cousin Wilchester in having enabled Hilda to marry the object of her affections" —

"By obtaining a living for him from his father. — True, my dear; and little did I surmise, when I thought of asking Dinton for Hurdiston, for the son of my old friend Armit, that it was to my own nephew it was promised. — And as you say, Netta, nothing would

have been more annoying to me, considering the terms existing between myself and the Harpsdens, than to have Olave living so close to Harrals: a sister's son married to a sister's daughter, — yet precluded from noticing either."

"And the more so," added Miss Wraysbury, following up her advantage, "that Olave inclines strongly towards the high church principles professed by his father; which *he* believes to have been conscientiously adopted by Mr. Harpsden, not from the sordid views you sometimes fancy."

"Don't talk to me of the father, Netta, if you wish me to live on happier terms with the son!"

"I will never mention his name again, Papa, if you will but relent towards your nephew; and suffer him to come here, not as Olave Harpsden, but as the rector of Havermead, — the future neighbour of dear Aunt Bessy, — the future husband of Hilda Wroughton."

Did Sir John Wraysbury deceive himself as well as Janetta, in seeming to yield to her solicitations, when he was, in fact, mollified towards his niece by the knowledge that it had depended on herself to enjoy an income more than half as considerable as his own? No matter! — He *seemed* to renounce his antipathies at her gentle yet earnest expostulation; and Miss Wraysbury finally quitted him with the warmest thanks, and most grateful filial kiss, with full authority

to dispatch an invitation to Olave. Bygones were to be bygones, and he was to make his appearance at Lynchcombe as soon as his induction at Havermead would permit, and leave it, only as the husband of Hilda Wroughton.

Two happier girls than the cousins that evening, it would have been difficult to find, not only in the county of Dorset, but throughout the range of England's fifty-two. The heart of poor little Netta expanded, till, like the witch in Thalaba, "still, her speech was song;" while Hilda, whose manners if not her temper had been a little soured by early adversity, exhibited the softening influence of happiness by a newfound sweetness that added a thousand charms to her beauty. — How they talked, by the fireside of Janetta's dressing-room: how they expatiated on past misunderstanding, and projects for future enjoyment! Such pleasant visits from Netta to Aunt Bessy; — such delightful sails, next summer, in the Alga! — For Olave, it appeared, was passionately fond of the sea; and Hilda had consequently already discovered that her theory concerning the sinfulness of seafaring, was as fallacious as many other whims and fancies of her girlhood.

There was only one point or person of mutual interest, to which neither of them made the slightest allusion. Lord Wilchester might have been as completely a myth or eidolon as Mrs. Harris, for any

place he appeared to occupy, or to have occupied, in the destinies of his two cousins. Yet it will be readily believed that he was the object all but uppermost in the thoughts of both. Was it that they were too happy to compass the full measure of their joy? Or did some little anxiety still deteriorate its perfection?

Two days afterwards, their sentiments were fairly put to the test. — The post-bag, — that hateful draw-back on the tranquillity of country life — produced letters addressed to Netta and her father, which, for a moment, instilled bitterness into their cup of joy.

Yet the epistle addressed to Miss Wraysbury was indited by the kindly hand of Aunt Sophy; and as full of love and sympathy as though written in diluted honey, rather than gall.

"I can scarcely tell you, my dear child," she wrote, "how completely we have enjoyed ourselves at Havermead; and none the less that I believe our visit to have been of the greatest service to poor Bessy. The society of my husband, whose unanimity of opinions and feelings with him whom she regards as her own, has seemed to afford her revelations from the dead: — so many doubts has he solved, and so many things crooked made straight. — She looks forward, too, with real satisfaction to the settlement of the Harpsdens at the Rectory. It was a happy thought of our dear Edgar. None of us have forgotten, or can ever forget, the comfort afforded to us by Olave

Harpsden in those dark, dark days of last February, — when all the happiness of this world seemed suddenly passing away; and he was the first to remind us that by yielding to that rebellious feeling, we were disentitling ourselves to the happiness of the world to come.

"You know that, from the first, Bessy was a warm partisan of your cousin Hilda. But for the sake of Olave, she would have taken to her heart, even a person to whom she was less affectionately disposed.

"But now, my dearest child, must follow an announcement that I know will grieve and vex you. We are not satisfied about Nonny. I need not remind you that in London, last spring, we had a consultation on her account, and were assured by three of the first medical authorities, that, if we can strengthen and cherish her through the next three years, nature will do the rest. Poor darling! — when her birth proved so great a disappointment to Sir John, little did he imagine that the preservation of that feeble life would some day constitute the sole care of a mind like Farmer's. For my husband is so wrapt up in his adopted child, that every word she utters, and every change of her sweet countenance, has interest and influence for him. Never was real father more loving! —

"But why do I relate what you already know so well? — Simply because it gives me pain to add that

Constance is this autumn so decidedly more delicate than ever, that we have decided to spend the winter at Madeira. It is a little more than a week's voyage from Southampton; and as Edgar and Lord Harmondswyke have long settled to start in a fortnight, we have made such arrangements amongst us as will monopolize the best accommodations of the packet.

"Therefore, dear Netta, we will come to Lynchcombe for a couple of days, to take leave of you, on the eve of embarkation; unless it would be more agreeable to Sir John to bring you to town for the purpose. For we shall spend a week in Eaton Square, for medical advice and a thousand minor preparations. Let me know by return of post, that I may frame my plans accordingly."

The formal family compliments that concluded the letter, were lost upon Miss Wraysbury. Her heart had received a startling blow. — Going, — all but gone! — About to brave the perils of the sea and the influences of a foreign country! — And dear Nonny too, and the Farmers, her rock of defence, — all about to disappear from her view.

What a winter was before her: — what a life was before her! — Hilda, transplanted to the happy home about to absorb every feeling of her heart. — Even Harry had already written to his father, on finding that the family was to winter in Dorsetshire, entreating permission to spend his Christmas holidays at Harrals.

"Impossible," wrote the precocious fox-hunter of the fifth form, "to live out of reach of the Pytchley; and in winter, Lynchcombe was so frightfully dreary."

Dreary, indeed! — Already poor Netta looked forward with dread to the loneliness of her splendid prison, — varied only by occasional large parties of strangers who created a loneliness greater than even its solitude. Of what use her books, — her music, — her easel, — her flowers, — with none to share her pursuits or sympathize with her pleasures? — Of what use the power of spending, even to profusion, with none to enjoy the result of her outlay? — Those oversheltering downs dividing her from Havermead, — that horrible world of waters before, that would shortly divide her from all she loved on earth, — oh! misery, misery! — How soon had the text so often preached upon in vain by Miss Avesford, that "she would some day learn to regard the days of her childhood as her happiest," been brought home to her conviction. — So young, yet already so unhappy: — so young, so prodigious an heiress, yet with hardships surrounding her on every side. —

Nor had she so much as the solace of sympathy in her anxieties. Sir John, who cared as little for poor little Nonny at ten years old as he had cared for her at half-an-hour, expressed an opinion that the Farmers were taking a very judicious precaution: and, if the truth must be told, was not sorry to lose sight

for a time of the old Q. C., who had become to him as a sort of reproving conscience. From Hilda, in the newly kindled joy of her heart, it would have been too much to require much compassion. As to Mrs. Wroughton, her poor niece would as soon have thought of confiding to *her* the intensity of her misery as to a hank of worsted.

But Aunt Clara, if unavailable as consolatress, had her merit, in the house of tribulation; by preventing people from brooding over their own thoughts. As Dean Swift's sprightly verses have recorded of Mrs. Dugby, she had always nothings to communicate, which distracted the attention of her companions from whatever occupied their minds.

Now, the same post-bag that brought Aunt Sophy's letter, brought also the newspaper containing a whole column-full of trash concerning the "Hymeneal Festivities at Molyneux Castle;" and having gratified herself by reading it aloud to her daughter and niece, she beset them for the remainder of the day with comments and notes explanatory. The Northamptonshire grandees enumerated as being present, were great facts to a gossip *née* Woolston. Right proud that Grobys and Maringtons should have dignified the wedding of her niece, she went through, again and again, the description of the allegorical embellishments of the "stupendous wedding-cake, the unrivalled production of the Earl of Dinton's well-known *chef*, Monsieur

Loncier, though designed by his Italian confectioner." For, as Clarissa Harlowe observed, in apology for tricking out her coffin, Aunt Clara's passion for needlework "had inspired her with a pretty taste for emblems."

Even the speech of that noble Earl, (whose wig was the only well-arranged part of his head,) which no one had understood a word when spoken, and no one attempted to read a word when printed, was deferentially perused by his sister-in-law. — When she read in italics, and a parenthesis, *(here the noble father of the bride became inaudible from emotion,)* instead of surmising the fact that a double set of *Dents Osanores* is apt to impede the articulation, she decided that the scene must have been truly affecting; and wondered whether, at dear Hilda's nuptials, her brother John, who had consented to officiate as father and give her away, would bestow upon the wedding party a specimen of that virgin eloquence, which he had not yet condescended to exhibit in the Senate. — For since inoculation was tried upon criminals, why should not the prose of a dull M. P. be first tested upon his country cousins?

And then, the ball that terminated the festivities of the day; — "opened by Viscount Wilchester, with the lovely and accomplished Miss Grandison of Blandhurst Park, the charming sister of the bridegroom!" — "The illumination of the façade of the Castle seen for

twenty miles round!" — "The attendance of Laurent's magnificent orchestra of forty musicians; in addition to the brass band of the Northamptonshire yeomanry cavalry, which performed at intervals on the terrace."

"Pray, *pray*, don't read any more, Aunt Clara," faltered Netta, venturing to interrupt her, and sick at heart with the thought that the echoes of all this tumult must have reached the quiet chancel where the two last Earls of Dinton were at rest.

Poor Mrs. Wroughton was consequently reduced to mutter over to herself the remainder of the column, guiding her eye with her finger like a charity child conning its primer; eventually summoning Mrs. Dysart to her own apartments, on pretence of orders to give about a window in her maid's room, that required listing; as a pretext for favouring her with a recapitulation of her family glories.

"And wishing you joy, Ma'am, I'm glad to find Miss Wroughton's turn is to come next," said Mrs. Dysart, at the close of the lecture, curtseying ironically, — for her scorn for her master's poor relations was about equal to that of Queen Mary for those of Henry Darnley's. "And I'm sure, Ma'am, I trust Miss Wraysbury's mayn't be far off, poor dear. For I've a fancy, Ma'am, the hair of Lynchcombe don't agree with her. She's not like herself since we come back from Lon'on; and Helmsley, and all the men, remarks at dinner, as she don't eat enough to

nourish a chicken. — I always speak my mind; and I wish she was well out of Dorsetshire."

It was well for Mrs. Dysart that Sir John W. W. did not hear the "hair" of his favourite estate thus vilely slandered. But he was shut up in his library: — reading what most country gentlemen read in libraries, — his letters: among which, was one which he perused and re-perused almost as admiringly as his sister Clara the grand description of the "Wedding in High Life" of her niece Theodosia. We use the word admiringly, in its antique sense, to signify wonder: — and no wonder that he wondered over the following cool epistle: —

"Tuileries, Sept. 28, 185—.

"Dear Sir,

"I have to acknowledge your favour of the 28th of August, which has been following me about, from Cowes to the Highlands, from the Highlands to Paris; where I am paying a passing visit to my old friend, Louis Napoleon. Thus, the English papers, I see, have got it, that I have come to meet Madame Lieven, who is here on her way to the south. But I need scarcely tell you, that this is a *canard*, invented at Tortoni's, with stock-jobbing intentions. Perpetual movement must be my excuse for not having sooner noticed your polite invitation to Lynchcombe; where, I fear, my dear Sir, that I cannot promise myself the pleasure of waiting upon you. During the recess,

I have usually matters to transact here, at Schönbrunn, Laeken, or the Hague, which form a great tax upon my time; and, as regards English visits, I am so sadly in arrear, that I find on my engagement list nearly two hundred overdue, without the least chance of knocking off even half-a-dozen visits, before the meeting of Parliament.

"But even were I to be disengaged for a few days, in the course of the next year or two, I may as well say at once that I am growing too old to draw new coverts. My gout, a constant companion, will not hear of domesticating where it is not forewarned against the draughts, and certain of the wine. There are not many country-houses in England that my health allows me to visit; and in justice to my trades-people and the insurance office, (I will not say to my heirs, who have little to gain or lose by my death,) I dare not venture into a colossal mansion like Lynch-combe, which, I am assured by our friend Dinton, covers more acres than the Middlesex Lunatic Asylum, — the most extensive building in the kingdom. — You will therefore, I am persuaded, have the very great kindness to excuse me.

"There is little news stirring here. They talk of a rising in Piedmont, where the malady is becoming chronic; and of a change of ministry at Naples, which has caused a slight fluctuation at the Bourse. But neither Trapanis nor Simplis have mentioned it to me

in their letters, and I therefore consider it unconfirmed. I am not quite so satisfied with the aspect of affairs in Spain; and I could not but advise Jacques Rothschild, yesterday at dinner, to look to his Spanish Bonds. The Duca di Santa Buobogliosa, whom you may have heard of as an ally of the Dintons, died the other day at Palermo. If you see him, the Earl, pray mention it to him; and believe me,

"Yours, my dear Sir, very truly,

"R. H.

"Be pleased to place me at the feet of your charming daughter."

Had Sir John Wraysbury been as well versed in the Spectator as in the bulletins of Jewsbury and Herapath, he would perhaps have recollected "Mr. Nibby's opinion of the belligerent intentions of the Grand Turk." As it was, he resigned himself to the impertinence of the accredited Negotiator-General, to whom (according to popular belief) clubs and money-markets bowed the knee. If the Cabinet did not presume to copy off the speech from the throne till Reuben Howard had contributed his *visa*, — if the Chancellor of the Exchequer found it necessary to be closeted with him previous to unfolding his Budget, — if the Jockey Club of Paris or Turf Club of London dared not issue a judgment contrary to his fiat, or the manager of either opera engage a *prima donna* till

Reuben's pen and ink had assisted in the negotiation, — of what avail the faint NEGO of a Sir John W. W.: — a tadpole aristocrat, engendered in the goldwash of a provincial compting-house! —

Of appreciating the temper of the blade by which he had been thus severely wounded, the millionary was as incapable as the leg of mutton cloven in twain by the Serjeant-Major of the Life Guards for the amusement of the nobility, gentry, and others, of distinguishing between the sabre of a hero and a butcher's chopper, — still less was he capable of understanding the real purpose and value of a better and cleverish man of the world like Reuben Howard: — to demolish, namely, the cobwebs spun by creatures still smaller than himself, — to insert into Bobadil's scabbard a peacock's feather, — to cut the wires of the political telegraph, in great emergencies, so as to render it impossible for the tergiversations and retractions of either party to be traced to the central station. And last and least, to discomfit the stilled pretensions of a Sir John W. W.: —

> Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
> And touch'd and sham'd by ridicule alone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When molested by those gnat-strings of society which to inferior minds constitute one of the ills of life, Sir John was in the habit of turning for consolation to a book as valuable in *his* eyes as, in those of Denny Cross, the old family Bible: — a certain quarto, clasped with brass, and lettered on the back, "Catalogue of Property:" — Part the first being countersigned on every page, by Messrs. Wortham and Stock, in acknowledgment of title deeds, mortgages, railway debentures, foreign funds, stock entries, and all sorts and conditions of the archives of Mammon deposited in their hands. — Part the second, by Messrs. Henderson and Hall, — to MSS. of a similar nature, including the rentroll of Harrals, and the investment of Lady Woolston's property. Then followed the catalogue of the plate room; — of the grand service, — the every-day service, — the travelling canteen. Next, the catalogue of pictures; — and finally, the furniture lists — lengthening till the crack of doom; much such a compendium, in short, as was drawn in substance out of the treasure of perdition of Praed's Red Fisherman, when

> There was turning of keys and creaking of locks,
> *And he* took the bait from his iron box.

Since the inventory rendered up by Cardinal Wolsey to Secretary Cromwell, of the treasures to be surrendered to the covetous grasp of his sovereign, never was there a grander enumeration of the gauds of life.

But somehow or other, the lines in which his soul delighted, possessed at that moment less than their usual attraction, For between the opening of those brazen clasps, and the perusal of Reuben Howard's letter, he had been compelled by his sister to listen to the pompous details of the wedding at Molyneux Castle. And the list of lords and ladies gay, and the officiating bishop whom he had not been invited to, jarred disagreeably in his mind against the consciousness that under his own roof, an indigent niece was about to be united by the parson of the parish to an ex-usher, with the heiress of Lynchcombe for her solitary bridesmaid. As regarded Netta herself, he had not so much as a quotable conquest to boast of! — Where was the use of his plate-lists? — What mattered his unique dessert service of rose du Barry Sèvres? — Reuben Howard disdained to eat upon them. — And it was throwing pearls before no matter what species of quadruped, to give his Comète Chablis, and George IV. sherry, to Philip Woolston, and his herd of squires.

He fulfilled, therefore, but fretfully the purpose for which he bad opened and examined the charter of

his possessions in the kingdom of Mammon; viz.: the inscription among his plate of a centre-piece, in which he had recently invested several thousand pounds, a *chef-d'œuvre* of one of the arts in which Great Britain is supposed to excel; and of course, like one of its hundred and twenty gun ships, much too cumbrous to be manœuvred for ordinary purposes; as well as, in his catalogue of pictures, a questionable Guido, which Reuben Howard had informed Lord Dinton it was his brother-in-law's duty to purchase; — and which he *had* bought, accordingly, at double its value, chiefly that his name might figure in the list of contributors to the exhibition of the Ancient Masters, at the British Institution. And having locked the volume of volumes into the iron drawer of his bureau, — (of which there existed in a corner of his heart a curiously corresponding duplicate), he went out in search of some daughter, sister, niece, or upper servant, on whom to vent his ill-humour.

Could one of his stirring, thriving, cheerful Liverpool kinsmen have seen him rise in a mood so atrabilarious, from the enumeration of those worldly treasures of which they fancied that John Woolston had half defrauded them, they would probably have considered that the millionary was not a much happier man than old Adam.

"Where is Miss Wraysbury?" said he, abruptly addressing Helmsley, whom he found in the dining-

room, where the luncheon-table was in process of being laid.

"I will inquire, Sir John: I think I heard she was out riding."

"At this time of the day? — Nonsense."

And Helmsley proceeded to seek means of self-justification. But he could only bring back confirmation of his first report.

"Miss Wraysbury was out in the grounds, on her Shetland pony."

Likely enough; for the day was exquisitely fine; the sky as blue as the background of the millionary's equivocal Guido; the atmosphere as delicious as —

> That breath in the air,
> That perfume and freshness, strange and rare,
> That warmth in the light and bliss everywhere
> As when young hearts yearn together.

Sir John, though not much of a stroller, except when a fall of timber was in contemplation, or a recent storm had damaged his corn-fields, was tempted by the beauty of the weather to set off and meet the Shetland pony. As Janetta would doubtless turn toward the house about luncheon time, it imported to know whether she had gone towards the American gardens, which lay northward, or to the southern slopes basking seaward in the midday sun; and his first halt was at the stables.

The officials of the department, high and low,

were at dinner in the hall: and not a biped visible in the stable-yard, except a tame jay belonging to one of the under-grooms, which kept saluting him from its cage as "old fellow!" an epithet more endearing than had ever been applied to him since he became rich and pompous; and a dirty errand boy of pure Dorsetshire breed, the white slave of the servants; who sat munching some bread and cheese on a door-step, and replied to the master of his many masters, as incoherently, from terror, as a Bucklersbury crossing-sweeper under interrogation by the Lord Mayor. —

"Miss war' gon 'on pony" —

"Where?"

"To sea."

"To West Cove, you mean? — And who accompanied her?"

"Nubbudy. Yoong gent as coom in fly war gon' ater her."

"What young gentleman?"

"Him as coom' wi' t'oother."

Perceiving that it would be easier to extract a rational neigh from any one of the fine animals enjoying their *otum cum dignitate*, and hay *cum* corn, in the polished oaken stalls of his magnificent stables, "forty, feeding like one;" Sir John betook himself towards West Cove; full of wonderments and misgivings arising from the singular communication of Beam'ster Bill; — dashing heedlessly down the thymy slopes,

and startling the quiet deer from their pleasant slumbers, as he had previously done poor Bill from his bread and cheese.

If these two young men in a fly should be strangers to *him*, yet no strangers to his daughter? If they should have made their way to Lynchcombe at the privately expressed desire of Janetta? She had attended balls and parties innumerable with the Duchess of Groby; where she formed acquaintances such as the world calls desirable; but mostly, alas! individuals to whom no man in his senses would entrust the happiness of his child.

And in the eyes of the votary of Mammon, Netta was more than his child: she was the heiress of Lynchcombe. To bestow her hand on any man, was like endowing him with a German principality: "*Deux millions de rentes*," or "eight hundred thousand gulden," or "four hundred thousand thalers," per annum; a fortune which had already caused even the arid lips of St. Marcel to water, which was cited as an item in the money market from one end of the kingdom to the other; and above all, which had decided the great Reuben to dedicate a postscript to her name. If all this were about to be wasted on some nameless adventurer, — a worse than Jem Grandison, — worse than Olave Harpsden, — a "gent as coom in a floy!"

He had walked or rather strided at so tremendous

a pace down that steep descent, and a Michaelmas sun was staring his agitation so fiercely out of countenance, that, throughout the most hurried of his trudges between Maple Hill and the Temple to keep appointments with some senior barrister, never had he been so scant of breath as when he reached the last wind of the cliff, round which the path dropped down to the fishing cottage. He could discern on the chalky road no trace of the pony's shoes: — nothing but a confusion of ordinary foot-prints. Not the slightest mark, vestige, or hint of his daughter or her companion.

Half way down the road, just where the gleaming steely ocean burst in brilliant brightness on the sight, the angry man ran against a poor woman toiling up the road; whom he found, on stopping to apologize, to be one of his own helots, *i. e.*, the keeper's wife of the fishing cottage. His civil excuses were accordingly converted into angry interrogations.

"Had Miss Wraysbury been at West Cove? And where was she herself going in such haste?" —

"To the Hall, Sir John, with a message from the young lady, to say they warn't to vait luncheon for her."

"You have seen her then? — In what direction is she gone?"

"No direction, Sir John. — Tandy had orders to ride round with the pony to Blandhurst Crag. Miss

Wraysbury said as she would walk along the shore and meet him at the Crag boundery-stone, with the young gentleman: a good mile and a half, Sir John; so that she couldn't no how, be home to luncheon." —

It was Captain Grandison, then, after all! — The walk in the direction of Blandhurst Crag was convincing in the eyes of Sir John! — But oh! duplicity of female nature! — How often had she declared to her father that one of the persons she most disliked in the world was that base and revengeful young Guardsman. — Was this the result of seven years' subordination under a patent governess with the salary of a couple of first-rate curates? — Was this the result of the chaperonage of the stiffest of duchesses, — of forty farthingale power of prudery and decorum? — If he had only found courage to marry again. — If he had but placed the gentle Lady Mary Molyneux at the head of his princely establishment, her grateful influence and example would have rendered the reckless Netta all that she should be; and there would have been no dissolute young scamps "coming in floys," to pay their addresses to the heiress of Lynchcombe. Like Coleridge's Sir Leoline,

> His heart was cleft with pain and rage,
> His cheeks they quiver'd, his eyes were wild,
> Dishonour'd thus in his old age, —
> Dishonour'd by his favourite child! —

For he had now attained the shore; when the tide

being up, the noisy waves were hissing and frothing upon the shingle that crunched and gave way under his unstable feet; so he had an uneasy standing while endeavouring to sweep the shore both West and East. No need of effort, however, to complete his survey. At about a quarter of a mile's distance, in a little nook hollowed in the cliff known along the coast as Lady Latimer's Hope, (because from the ledge forming a seat within the hollow, one of the former dames of that decayed family was supposed to have watched, year after year, for the return of a ship of war commanded by her only son, which had foundered in the Spanish Main,) sat Janetta; blithe as a bird, and engaged in animated conversation with — how was he to decide whom? — A pea jacket and a wide-awake were all he saw of the "young gent" whose back was turned towards him; and who, after the fashion of the day, exhibited all the appearance of a dry-land cabin-boy.

He shouted to attract the attention of the offenders: but disturbed only a couple of gulls, that rose screaming from the sparkling waves on which they had been riding, — probably mistaking the noisy intruder for a modern Demosthenes, perfecting his elocution by rehearsing an oration on the Poor Law, beside the loud sea waves.

Sir John W. W. had not undergone so severe an attack of irascibility as now brought the colour to his

face. Since the crisis at which he was introduced to the reader, in the stuffy old red dining-room at Harrals; — how different from the breezy atmosphere, angular cliffs, standing out against the autumn sky and dancing waters, that seemed to rejoice in the clear light of a Midsummer day!

But as such a state of mind renders a man far from pleasant company, let us retrace the more interesting incidents of his daughter's morning ride.

Though Netta had quitted home with a heavy head and heavy heart, the moral dyspepsia which had produced these ailments soon gave way under the cheering influence of the weather, and the auspicious aspect of nature. Before she had reached half way down the hill from the hall-door to the lodge, opening to the West Cove road, the spirited pace of her true-footed little groom, who, with his rough coat and long mane ruffled by the sea-breeze, afforded a curious contrast to the high-bred Brenda, her accustomed palfrey, had roused her up into new life. — Else she would have been more startled, when a strange hand was laid upon her bridle, a few minutes after passing the lodge; while a voice, — *not* strange, very far from strange, — bade her "Stand and deliver."

The footpad was, of course, the "yoong gent as coom in the floy;" and the young gent, it seems scarcely need to explain to even the least imaginative of modern readers, was the cousin Edgar, who had

assuring him that the mere announcement of my departure —"

Janetta endeavoured to withdraw her hands from his grasp. But Priam might as well have attempted to disentangle his bridle from those of Tandy. —

"That the mere announcement of my departure was breaking the dearest little heart in the world."

"Edgar!"

"How, but for such a declaration on the part of your daily companion, could I have ventured to suppose it? — Did you not treat me in London worse than your father treated any thing of the name of Harpsden? — Did you not absent yourself from home, every time I accepted an invitation to Carlton Gardens?"

"Was I to remain, and see you devote your whole attention to my cousin Hilda?"

"When did you ever see me do any thing of the kind?"

"The will, at least, was not wanting."

"The will *was* wanting. — I see you are aware of the fact that I once offered to Hilda Wroughton my heart and hand. Had you not known it, I should have myself apprized you. I am not the least ashamed of it, Netta. — I fell in love with her at Aix, when she was ten years old, and the most beautiful little creature ever seen; when behold, my father who had grown horribly ashamed of his old friend Dick Wrough-

ton, forbad Theo. and myself to form any sort of cousinly intimacy with his little daughter. I hope you are sufficiently cognizant of human nature, my darling cousin, to understand the intense longing for her company, with which this prohibition inspired us."

"Edgar!'

"So that when, six years afterwards, having grown to hobbledehoy's estate, I went to visit Berty Grandison at Frankfort, and found my boyish love progressing into the most beautiful girl I ever saw (admit, Netta, that it is scarcely possible to imagine anything handsomer than Hilda?) — my dormant passion blazed up again; and almost before I had said 'how d'ye do,' I asked her to be my wife" —

"Which she very wisely declined." —

"I don't know about wisely, — but it was with an air of most complete disgust, — as if it were any fault of mine that Olave Harpsden is twice as good-looking a fellow as I am, — twenty times as sensible, and millions of times better informed!"

"*Well?*" —

"Well, — when recalled to my sober senses by having a bucket of cold water thrown in my face, — for all this was placed before me by Hilda in far plainer English than I am relating it, — after half an hour's intention of shooting myself, *à la* Werther, or plunging into the Main for a purpose more serious than cold-bathing, — I began to think my lady cousin

might be in the right, and that I should have been a terrible match for her, whether as regards the Sublime or the Beautiful."

"And that completed your cure?"

"Almost, — but what *completely* completed it —"

Netta drew a little closer, to listen.

"Was the sight of a sweet little face, with a pair of spaniel-like eyes mooning out of a barouche somewhere in Northamptonshire, the glances of which fell accidentally upon poor me as upon any other clod of the valley, yet went straight to the foundations of my heart." —

"Oh, Edgar! Edgar!"

"And do you pretend that you did not perceive it?"

"Not *then*, certainly. — But once at Molyneux Castle, on that dreadful night of dear Lord Dinton's death, — when, in spite of all that Dr. Gardener's prohibition, I crept into the forbidden corridor, where you were pacing up and down —"

"Like an angel of comfort, as you were: — and we sat down together in the window-seat — miserable and hopeless — but holding each other's hands as we are doing now, — only that *then* they were like ice, and tears were streaming down our faces. And presently when Olave came out of the chamber of death —"

"Dear Edgar! — Not another word about it *now!* — But *that* night I certainly believed you loved me."

"And so I did, — and so I do, — and so I have done any time this twelvemonth."

"Then why not say so before?" —

"Latterly, because you seemed to have taken a dislike to me. But in the first instance, from the same perversity of nature that prompted my passion for Hilda. — From the day I first heard your name I was bidden to make up to you, which made me break up your playthings and call you Miss W. W. — At a later period, my father and mother let fall that their chief motive in making a present of me to my grandfather and grandmother, to be licked (at Harrow) into shape, was a hope that I might make up a match with the future heiress of Lynchcombe. — Netta, how I hated the notion! how I hated the very name!"

"As well you might."

"And had I remained poor Edgar Molyneux, whose chances in life depended upon an advantageous marriage, even had the spaniel-like eyes been ten times more attractive, never would I have pretended to your hand. It is only because independent in fortune and position, that I have ventured to give ear to the flattering suggestions of Hilda and Olave."

"And is not this touchy pride almost worse than fortune-hunting?"

"If you dare to say so, I shall think it necessary to silence you in the most absolute manner."

"Then, I will certainly say nothing to displease you; though I still think that the threat of Madeira deserves some kind of punishment. And then Hilda, who certainly gave me to understand that you were still attached to her."

"She owned to me as much, just now. But she says, that, perceiving you were becoming strongly attached to me (forgive me, darling, it is *her* daring assertion, not my own), and have heard me no end of times declare that, were there no other girl in England, nothing would induce me ever to offer my hand to the heiress of Lynchcombe, she thought it best, at all risks, to work your cure, by giving you some insight into my previous attachment to herself. But I believe you formed over-hasty conclusions from her hints. I am *certain* you dealt over-hasty punishment on one who was no delinquent."

"If she only knew how wretched she made me by her officious interference!"

"She did, — did she?" said Edgar, snatching his idolized cousin to his heart. — "And after *that* admission, you pretend to hesitate about becoming my wife! Netta, dearest, — darlingest Netta! — consent at once; — or I shall fancy you are weighing me in the balance against Jem Grandison, or that hook-nosed Jew, St. Marcel!"

"But what does Uncle Farmer say to your intentions, Edgar?" pleaded Miss Wraysbury, with the

natural clinging of her sex to its prerogative of delay. "You will not deny that he wholly disapproves marriages between cousins?"

"He formerly entertained that vulgar error, but Olave and I have out-argued the dear old fellow. We dined last night in Eaton Place; and managed to convince him that *your* happiness in life as well as mine was only to be secured by a speedy marriage. To tell you the truth, Netta, that heart of gold of his is so softened by his anxiety concerning poor little Nonny, that he seems disposed to propitiate the mercy of Heaven by the sacrifice of all his prejudices, and the promotion of universal peace. — Nothing like the dread of a great calamity to render tolerant and humane even the hardest of human hearts."

"The *hardest.* But there was no need of any such cruel influence to secure *his* kindly indulgence!" said Miss Wraysbury.

"It cannot, however, fail to give you pleasure to learn, on Farmer's unimpeachable authority, that my dear uncle, Dinton (our dear uncle, Netta), would have preferred you for his future niece, before any person in the world. That we were so nearly connected by the ties of nature, was the only obstacle. But even *that* objection, Farmer frankly admits, he would have been quite ready to overlook."

"You have, therefore, obtained your own consent to make me your wife, — and are waiting only for mine and my father's?" inquired Netta, endeavouring to smile, though the tears were trickling down her flushed cheeks.

And such was the critical moment at which Sir John W. W. made his agitated appearance on the shore of West Cove. Long before he managed to reach Lady Latimer's Hope, however, Edgar, by turning round, had solved all his doubts and satisfied his paternal anxiety by convincing him that the "young gent," who had produced so much consternation, was the very man, of all England, he wished to discover at the feet of his daughter.

It was no difficult matter — it required, indeed, only a few minutes — to induce him to afford his delighted consent to the union of the future Earl of Dinton with the future Heiress of Lynchcombe.

Nay, so long had he brooded over the possibility of this auspicious alliance, that the old head now affixed to old shoulders, had contemplated every contingency of the case; and was prepared to assign to Janetta, as her future house, the ancestral estate of Harrals, which had now become distasteful to him as a residence, with an allowance of ten thousand a-year to enable her to keep up its honours.

"At my death," said he, "the place will, of course, become the property of your brother, whose rent-roll I shall make up to the same sum. — But you will, my dear Janetta, then succeed me at Lynchcombe, and enter into full enjoyment of the property which renders you the richest heiress of the kingdom. And it may gratify you to know, my dear daughter, that I could not bestow it more agreeably to myself, than on him you have selected as your husband; my friend poor Dinton's nephew, — my sister's only son."

And now, dear reader, having wearied you more than enough by relating the Hardships of an Heiress, we promise to spare you all details of the double wedding. Suffice it that two happier couples never stood before the altar, than these four favourites of nature.

Edgar and Janetta proceeded to spend the honey-moon at Harrals, and Olave and his wife betook themselves at once to their pretty parsonage, which, to render justice to Sir John, he had exhibited unwonted liberality in preparing for the reception of his nephew and niece. But Lord and Lady Wilchester are passing the winter at Madeira, that the Farmers may be better prepared by their presence to meet an impending misfortune.

It is universally prophesied that, before their return, a Lady Mary Woolston Wraysbury will be doing

the honours of the splendid domain of Wilchester; and both to the new Viscountess and her brother Harry, such an accession to the family circle would be highly acceptable. Old Farmer, however, shakes his head; and predicts that his friend Dinton's favourite sister will never be tempted to overlook the altered nature of the millionary, by the lure of Mammon.

The only individual who has ventured to impute interested motives to the handsome and high-spirited young Viscount, on occasion of his marriage, is the Negociator General: who, in his reply to Lord Dinton's letter announcing the match, and entreating him to order the carriages which he intended as his wedding present to the young couple, saw fit to express his regrets at the secession from political life he foresaw for the young member.

"Declinat cursus, aurumqué volubile tollit," wrote old Reuben, — fancying, as usual, that he saw further than his neighbours. But to his friend at Molyneux Castle, his Latin was of course Greek.

Meanwhile, peace and happiness are with them all. Lady Wilchester experiences some little regret at the idea that her prospects at Harrals are somewhat deteriorated by the altered tone of society at Molyneux Castle; and that having resolved to transfer

her devotions in the church, containing the grave of her mother, she must conform to the position established there by the father of Olave. But these minor misfortunes constitute, we are happy to add, the last Hardships of the Heiress.

THE END.

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